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► COVID-19 and the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean labour market

A rapid assessment of impact and policy
responses at the end of Q3, 2020



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Disclaimer 1: Throughout this publication the term *Caribbean* represents the English- and Dutch-speaking part of the sub region. Where a different subset of Caribbean countries is intended (e.g. ILO Modelled estimates), suitable reference is presented in the text or footnotes.

Disclaimer 2: The information contained in this publication is actualized to the month of October 2020. By the very nature of the COVID-19 crisis and of the areas under investigation, changes may be fast paced as well as there may be availability of new data. The reader is advised to be mindful of those developments.

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First published 2020

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ILO Cataloguing in Publication Data

COVID-19 and the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean labour market.
A rapid assessment of impact and policy responses at the end of Q3, 2020

International Labour Organization, Office for the Caribbean - Port of Spain: ILO, 2020.

978-92-2-033717-2 (Web PDF)

ILO DWT and Office for the Caribbean

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Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

► Acknowledgement

This report was prepared by the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean (ILO-DWT/O) under the supervision and with the contribution of Mr Diego Rei, ILO Employment and Labour Market Policies Specialist. Other ILO contributors include Mr Ariel Pino, Social Protection and OSH Specialist, Mr Shingo Miyake, Labour Law and International Labour Standards Specialist, Ms Vanessa Phala, Employers' Activities Senior Specialist, Ms Vera Guseva, Workers' Activities Specialist, Mr Hassan Ndahi, Skills and Employability Senior Specialist, and Ms Virginia Rose Losada, Sustainable Enterprise Development and Job Creation Specialist. Mr Dennis Zulu, Director, and Mr Lars Johansen, Deputy Director, provided prized guidance and advice.

Ms Latisha Harry provided valuable research assistance. Special thanks go to SACODA Serv Limited and to Mr Marcelo Alvarenga for assistance with conducting relevant interviews. Ms Nadimah Mohammed, Independent Policy Research Consultant, Ms Roxana Maurizio, Research Consultant and Ms Marcela Cabezas, Regional Labour Statistician, ILO Americas, shared expert advice in the preparation of this report. Ms Suzanne Joseph and Ms Shireen Cuthbert provided fundamental editing for the document while Ms Joseph prepared the layout.

A white rectangular sign is suspended by a light-colored rope. The sign features the word 'CLOSED' in large, bold, black capital letters. Below it, the words 'Due to' are written in a smaller, black, cursive script. At the bottom of the sign, the word 'CORONAVIRUS' is written in large, bold, red capital letters. The background is a dark, out-of-focus interior space.

CLOSED
Due to
CORONAVIRUS

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► List of acronyms

BCCEC	The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation
BCCI	Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry
BEC	The Barbados Employers' Confederation
BWU	Barbados Workers' Union
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
DEF	Dominica Employers' Federation
EBMOs	Employer and Business Membership Organizations
ECATT	The Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECD	Eastern Caribbean Dollar
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDP	Gross domestic product
HEART Trust/NTA	The Human Employment and Resource Training Trust/National Training Agency
JEF	Jamaica Employers' Federation
JHWU	Jamaica Household Workers' Union
ICLS	International Conference of Labour Statisticians
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILS	International Labour Standards
KYD	Cayman Islands dollar
ILO	International Labour Organization
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MLSS	Ministry of Labour and Social Security
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOL	Ministry of Labour
MOL/H	Ministry of Labour/Health
MSMEs	Micro, small, and medium enterprises
NATUC	National Trade Union Centre
NCCC	National Coordination Committee on COVID-19
NCTU	National Congress of Trade Unions
NIC	National Insurance Corporation
NSOs	National Statistical Offices
NTAC	National Tripartite Advisory Committee
NTUCB	National Trade Union Congress of Belize
OSH	Occupational safety and health
OSHA	Occupational Safety and Health Authority
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PAVE	Pedestrian Access for Village Enhancement Programme
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PPE	Personal protective equipment
Q1	First quarter
Q2	Second quarter
Q3	Third quarter
RT-PCR	Real time polymerase chain reaction
SKNCCI	St Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
TLU	Trades and Labour Union

TTD	Trinidad and Tobago Dollar
TUF	Trade Union Federation
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
USD	United States Dollar
VAT	Value-added tax
WHO	World Health Organization

► Executive summary

As expected with a significantly reduced output production and deteriorating trade flows and fiscal space, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market in the Caribbean has been massive. The impact on different segments of the working population however, is hard to exactly determine.

ILO modelled estimates presented in September 2020 suggest a gradual recovery for the Caribbean labour market during the third quarter (Q3) of 2020, although losses remain high. Data show that despite a reduction between the second and third quarter of 2020, work hour losses are expected to remain high at 12.8 per cent (in line with the global average of 12.1 per cent). This is, however, substantially lower than the combined average of 25.6 per cent for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which is significantly skewed by the former. Similarly, 1.87 million full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs¹ are expected to be lost in the Caribbean (against a total of 345 million FTE jobs worldwide and 60 million for the LAC region).

Recovery can be imputed to the partial reopening of the tourism sector starting from June 2020, which provided immediate benefits in certain countries. These included increasing the hours worked and - most likely - the number of people employed, as well as the more or less concomitant relaxation of the strictest social/physical distancing rules. The latter allowed for a recovery in internal demand/activity and some export-oriented production, especially in commodity exporting countries. If the experience of past shocks is to be repeated, those who may benefit first are longer tenured workers who lost employment.

Depending on the country and industry of pre-COVID employment, shifts to employment with less hours of work; unemployment; or out of the labour force status have occurred. Survey and administrative data for the first quarter (Q1) and second quarter (Q2) of 2020 suggest that - depending on the country - both unemployment and inactivity rates have increased. While differences by gender are not necessarily consistent across all sources, youth have most likely been impacted disproportionately relative to the rest of the working population (surveys from Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia confirm a spike in their unemployment rate).

In any case, evidence suggests a polarization of the impact: some workers bore the biggest burden, while others maintained employment or at least a reasonable degree of labour market attachment. Self-employment seems to have not played the traditional role of buffering the impacts of the crisis. Additionally, there is not enough evidence to conclude whether informal employment provided a cushion in the Caribbean. For reference, in Latin America this does not appear to be the case. As expected, at risk industries such as retail, trade, manufacturing, accommodation and food were among those most impacted.

Government policy responses have been designed mostly to provide emergency or temporary relief but were, at the same time, many, usually quick and structured. While typically limited in magnitude, income support measures and assistance to economic units have been widespread and have allowed citizens, workers and business, albeit not all, to keep afloat. In 13 of the 22 countries examined, governments attached employment retention conditionality for at least one measure to support businesses.

Official registration was a common feature to access targeted business support across the region with fifteen countries making this an explicit requirement. None the less, persons in the informal economy were still able to benefit from relief targeting the general population or from relief designed warranting special concessions for workers in the informal economy. This exception was generally attached to the provision of cash transfers in countries such as Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, The Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago.

¹ The ILO estimates focus on the decline in hours worked and is estimated via a “nowcasting” model (see ILO 2020). The data are not based on more common - but less precise or completely unavailable, in the current context - labour market indicators such as the unemployment rate. While the full-time equivalent employment losses are presented to illustrate the severity of the estimates of hours lost, the figures should not be interpreted as numbers of jobs actually lost nor increases in unemployment.

In order to support their economic units, some countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Cayman Islands, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago) have begun to explore a wider variety of measures or a bundle of policies. This approach seeks to move beyond providing financial relief and towards equipping businesses to better navigate the difficulties, adapting to new ways of doing business or entering into new sectors, as a means of making the private sector on the whole more resilient.

Measures aimed at maintaining or enhancing human capital have been designed, structured and accompanied by a shift to online training, which is not exempt from challenges. The actual incidence and number of beneficiaries varies from country to country, with some countries (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Saint Lucia, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago) appearing more active. There were almost no cases where skills enhancing measures were combined simultaneously with income or enterprise support transfers or subsidies.

Working conditions have been challenged during the pandemic. A first response came from the occupational safety and health (OSH) front where considerable efforts have been made to ensure safe and healthy workplaces to avoid contagion of workers as well as third parties. Stay-at-home orders converted households into workplaces, sparking additional challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, unavailability of technical equipment and internet connection, ergonomics and work-life balance.

In the area of legislation, countries have taken a variety of measures to respond to issues on employment and working conditions. In terms of the types of measures, some countries amended their labour legislation (Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands). In virtually all other countries, the existing legislation was implemented or its contents were clarified to the stakeholders for better implementation in the form of advisories. Matters addressed included issues such as working time (which may be shortened or extended), wages (which may be reduced in certain cases), temporary layoff (period extended for retention of employment) and flexible modalities of work (teleworking or working from home). In one case, a general measure was adopted allowing the Cabinet to authorize exemption from the provisions of labour legislation (Cayman Islands).

Social dialogue has been an integral part of most coordinated policy responses, but some gaps have emerged. On the one hand, workers' and employer's organizations effectively addressed the challenges of the pandemic by engaging with ministries of labour and ministries of health to identify challenges and craft responses to protect workers and keep businesses afloat. This played a pivotal role with the groups they represent by providing guidance and information during the pandemic. At the policy level, stakeholders in the tourism sector were heavily involved where tripartism occurred, however, other essential industries (specifically agriculture and entertainment) were less, if at all, involved. More troubling is that discussions have not always resulted in joint interventions by unions and employers with such interventions taking place in less than half of the countries. Changes must be made on both ends for productive outcomes.

Recommendations for the future include the need to continue providing emergency relief, while focusing on avoiding the scarring effect and preventing long-term unemployment. This can be achieved by providing adequate support to vulnerable groups (especially youth) and allowing employers to co-determine skilling and employability needs (which have gained absolute importance), while skilling/reskilling programmes may need to move to online modalities. In particular, employment services may need to step up to embrace a coordinating role amongst government actors providing relief and reinsertion assistance in order to facilitate a structured flow of beneficiaries between different programmes.

The most recent regional developments and the operating procedures established to dispatch relief funds suggest that countries should transform temporary income replacement programmes into a comprehensive system of unemployment insurance. Such a system would be based on full integration of data sources and effective linkages with active labour market programmes.

A fundamental question that lies ahead is linked to cash injections to cope with the effects of the pandemic. While these quick supplies of money have become common, funds are mostly channelled to finance temporary cash transfers and rarely have strategic components to address the need to have comprehensive social protection systems that will be ready to support shocks. Similarly, the financing of policies targeted at bolstering (labour) productivity is still mostly vague and seldom reflect a time horizon beyond the yearly budgetary one.

While it can be expected that businesses and governments will have to continue operating with high levels of uncertainty about the future, Caribbean governments should start or continue to explore policies that further help to diversify their national economies, digitize processes, as well as foster entrepreneurial activity and investments in new sectors such as the green and blue sectors.

Closely linked to policies that encourage diversification, there remains a need for Caribbean governments to continue to work on policy interventions which create an enabling environment and incentives for innovative start-ups to expand, or close and divert to other business goals. It is essential to have medium- to longer-term policies that support entrepreneurship and innovation. Such policies can make it easier for potential entrepreneurs to innovate in response to market changes post-COVID-19, and to change their products, services and business models with the full participation of Employer and Business Membership Organizations (EBMOs).

In terms of labour legislation, the recommendation is to ensure the strengthening of the rule of law by preemptively putting in place, laws and regulations, and by making practical guidance available. The existing laws might be amended or new laws be adopted, which would set out principles that must be upheld even during emergency, provide for special protection for employers and workers, and which would lay out necessary flexibilities.

Finally, a systematic resort to social dialogue must be the norm in all cases. Recommendations include a timely starting point in case of crisis; participation of the social partners at all stages of the policy response (initial needs assessment, formulation of measures, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation), including in the assessment of the measures implemented during the past months and consideration for emergency mechanism to allow full participation without compromising the timing of the response.

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► Introduction

By 16 October 2020, the number of COVID-19 infections had exceeded 41,216 confirmed cases in CARICOM Member States and associate members,² with a death toll of 934, and with all the countries and non-metropolitan territories of the region affected. These figures correspond to 1,113 cumulative cases per one million population (CARICOM Member States and associate members) and 25.2 cumulative deaths per one million population (CARICOM Member States and associate members). For reference, the corresponding value is 22,911 and 641 for the United States of America, and 8,704 and 630 for the United Kingdom.³

Since the beginning of the pandemic, a number of regional, national and local policies and programmes have been introduced to prevent the spread of the virus and to minimize the negative impact on the economic activity and the labour market in the Caribbean region.⁴ Full or partial national lockdown measures have been and still are, as of October 2020, a common instance. At the same time, countries imposed travel restrictions according to a non-uniform schedule reflecting local health circumstances, reliance on the tourism industry and other national considerations.⁵

The present report aims to take stock of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the labour market in the region and provide a systematic review of the main policy measures implemented by governments and social partners of the region. Part 1 presents the limited data and projections available as at 5 November 2020, describing the impact of COVID-19 on macroeconomic indicators and the labour market, while referencing trends and developments in other parts of the world. Part 2 investigates the full spectrum of measures implemented in the region most directly affecting the labour market and the economic units. After a broad and in depth overview of all measures implemented within countries and non-metropolitan territories, the results of investigation in ILO's critical areas of operation are presented. Specific attention is dedicated to the protection of workers and workers' rights (through the lenses of occupational safety and health, and changes and modifications in labour legislation), support to job seekers, change in the operation of employers' and workers' organizations, and the involvement of both parties in social dialogue throughout the national response. Part 3 concludes and presents recommendations for the near future and broader implications on labour market developments.

2 Source: CARICOM, Special Topic Statistical Bulletin - COVID-19 Issue 30, 16 October 2020

3 See <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20201012-weekly-epi-update-9.pdf>.

4 The ILO Office for the Caribbean has systematically inventoried the country policy responses since the outset of the crisis. The updated versions of those is available on line at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/regional-country/country-responses/lang-en/index.htm>.

5 These reflect, amongst others, the fact that few countries of the region undertook national elections during the first, second or third quarter of 2020 including Anguilla, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Belize will hold national elections in November 2020 and Saint Vincent and Grenadines and Turks and Caicos will hold them in December 2020.



► Part 1: Macroeconomic and employment outlook

► A. Macroeconomic and sectoral outlook

Aggregate production. Similar to the rest of the world, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on aggregate production in the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean is projected to be sizable. Table 1 illustrates how gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to decline, ranging from a minimum of 5.6 per cent (Trinidad and Tobago, according to the estimates from IMF in September 2020) to up to 25.5 per cent (Anguilla, according to the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank). An average decline of 5.4 per cent for the Caribbean region.⁶ Note, however, that the negative average trend is significantly offset by the positive value for Guyana (due to the beginning of oil extraction).⁷

► Table 1

Change in GDP growth, 2020. Projections (different sources)

Country	IMF: Apr 2020	ECLAC: May 2020	ECLAC: Jul 2020	IMF: May-Jul 2020	Central banks: Jul 2020	UNCTAD: Sep 2020	IMF: Oct 2020
Anguilla	-	-	-	-	-25.5	-	-
Antigua and Barbuda	-10.0	-7.2	-12.3	-	-17.8	-	-17.3
Aruba	-13.7	-	-	-	-	-	-19.7
The Bahamas	-8.3	-6.8	-10.5	-12.5	-	-	-14.8
Barbados	-7.6	-5.8	-8.8	-11.6	-	-	-16
Belize	-12.0	-3.9	-14.0	-	-	-	-
Bermuda	-	-	-8.1	-	-	-	-
British Virgin Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cayman Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Curaçao	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

⁶ Corresponding to CARICOM Member States but excluding Belize and including Puerto Rico and Haiti (as per IMF estimates).

⁷ With regard to the latter, note, however, that in her address during the presentation of the budget in September 2020, the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Oneidge Walrond, informed the National Assembly that in the area of tourism, 62 per cent of hotels, guest houses, resorts and other places that provided entertainment and leisure are either closed or have drastically scaled down their services. In addition, she mentioned that Guyana's non-oil economic Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to contract by up to 5 per cent. See '[Non-oil economy, tourism sector contracted because of COVID, political crisis – Minister](#)', Guyana Times, 21 September 2020.

► Table 1 continued

Change in GDP growth, 2020. Projections (different sources)

Country	IMF: Apr 2020	ECLAC: May 2020	ECLAC: Jul 2020	IMF: May-Jul 2020	Central banks: Jul 2020	UNCTAD: Sep 2020	IMF: Oct 2020
Dominica	-	-3.6	-8.1	-	-8.7	-	-8.8
Grenada	-8.0	-7.3	-10.5	-9.2	-16.4	-	-11.8
Guyana	-	56.4	44.3	-	-	-	26.2
Jamaica	-5.6	-5.3	-5.3	-5.3	-	-	-8.6
Montserrat	-	-	-	-	-4.0	-	-
Saint Kitts and Nevis	-8.1	-6.5	-11.5	-	-16.1	-	-18.7
Saint Lucia	-	-8.1	-11.9	-8.5	-	-	-16.9
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	-	-3.6		-5.5	-5.3	-	-7
Sint Maarten	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Suriname	-4.9	-4.4	-7.0	-	-	-	-13.1
Trinidad and Tobago	-4.5	-5	-7.1	-	-	-	-5.6
Turks and Caicos Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
The Caribbean	-	-2.5	-5.4	-	-	-6.4	-5.4
LAC	-5.2	-5.3	-9.1	-	-	-7.6	-8.1

Sources:

Column 1: IMF, 'World Economic Outlook Update', April 2020.

Column 2: ECLAC, 'Report on the economic impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on Latin America and the Caribbean', May 2020.

Column 3: ECLAC, 'Addressing the growing impact of COVID-19 with a view to reactivation with equality: New projections', Special report COVID-19, 15 July 2020.

Column 4: The Bahamas: International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[Bahamas: Request for purchase under the rapid financing instrument-Press release; Staff report; and Statement by the Executive Director for The Bahamas](#)', Country Report No. 2020/191 (Washington, DC: IMF, June 2020).

Barbados: International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[Barbados: Third review under the extended arrangement, requests for augmentation of access, and modification of performance criteria—Press release; Staff report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Barbados](#)', Country report no. 2020/192 (Washington, DC: IMF, June 2020).

Grenada: International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[Grenada: Request for disbursement under the rapid credit facility: Press release; Staff report; Staff statement; and Statement by the Executive Director for Grenada](#)', Country report no. 2020/161 (Washington, DC: IMF, 13 May 2020).

Jamaica: International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[Jamaica: Request for purchase under the rapid financing instrument-Press release; Staff report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Jamaica](#)', Country report no. 2020/167 (Washington, DC: IMF, 18 May 2020).

Saint Lucia: International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[St. Lucia: Request for disbursement under the rapid credit facility-press release; and Staff report](#)' (Washington, DC: IMF, 12 May 2020).

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines - International Monetary Fund. Western Hemisphere Dept., '[St. Vincent and the Grenadines: Request for disbursement under the rapid credit facility-press release; Staff report; and Statement by the Executive Director for St. Vincent and the Grenadines](#)', Country report no. 2020/179 (Washington, DC: IMF, 29 May 2020).

Column 5: '[Dashboard Datas | Eastern Caribbean Central Bank](#)', accessed 15 September 2020.

Column 6: '[World Economic Outlook \(October 2020\) - real GDP growth](#)', accessed 14 October 2020.

Column 7: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, '[Trade and development report 2020 - from global pandemic to prosperity for all: Avoiding another lost decade](#)' (New York, USA: UNCTAD, 22 September 2020).

The pandemic would slash ten years of economic growth. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates show that at the end of 2020, the level of GDP per capita in Latin America and the Caribbean shall be similar to that observed in 2010.⁸

Considering the whole set of estimates and projections realized over 2020 - and not discounting the lack of immediate comparability between them - there seem to be a couple of common trends. On the one hand, initial figures (April 2020) seemed - perhaps unsurprisingly - to underestimate the impact of the crisis (with the partial exception of Jamaica) which is turning out to be deeper and expected to last longer than initially considered. Reliance on tourism, the plunge in arrivals and the limited recovery through the 3Q certainly played a substantial role in this pattern, as well as the declining price of oil.⁹ On the other hand, the markedly rising gold prices did little to balance the fall in economic activity for a main exporter such as Suriname.

► Text box 1

The impact of COVID-19 on enterprises in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago (April-May 2020)¹⁰

- In Barbados, 38 per cent of surveyed enterprises had stopped operating due to the COVID-19 crisis; 32 per cent are partially operating; 23 per cent were operating remotely; and 7 per cent were fully operating on site. In Trinidad and Tobago, 17 per cent of surveyed enterprises had stopped operating due to COVID-19 crisis; 38 per cent were partially operating; 26 per cent were able to operate remotely; and 19 per cent continued to fully operate on site.
- In both countries, the highest share of enterprises not operating were small and medium in size and from the retail and sales, restaurant, printing/publishing and tourism sectors.
- Some of the enterprises had dismissed or planned to dismiss workers in both Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.
- Sixty-nine and 55 per cent of enterprises in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, respectively, stated that cash flow to maintain staff and business operations was inadequate.
- The disruption of supply chains was another key issue impacting businesses. In Barbados, 29 per cent of enterprises reported that suppliers were unable to provide inputs; and 36 per cent said that their business partners had been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. In Trinidad and Tobago, approximately 16 per cent of enterprises reported that suppliers were unable to provide inputs; and 23 per cent indicated that business partners, many of which were based overseas, were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.
- In terms of the financial impact of COVID-19 on revenue or sales, 66 per cent of enterprises in Barbados and 56 per cent of enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago reported high impact, while 20 per cent of enterprises reported medium impact. Financial impact was particularly high among medium to large and large enterprises, including retail and sales, real estate, food and beverage and the tourism sectors.
- Only 37 per cent of surveyed enterprises in Barbados, and 40 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago reported having a business continuity plan in place before the COVID-19 crisis. This is worrisome and could significantly delay the recovery or even viability for many enterprises.

⁸ See ECLAC, 'Addressing the growing impact of COVID-19 with a view to reactivation with equality: New projections', Special report COVID-19, 15 July 2020.

⁹ Oil prices have recovered and stabilized at around the USD40 per barrel (WTI), after the lows reached in March and future prices set for the next 6 to 12 months (as of September 2020) have also stabilized at around USD40 per barrel. Natural gas, conversely, is projected to slightly recover at around USD3 MMBtu for the next three to six months.

¹⁰ The information presented is the summary of the findings of the business needs survey conducted by the Barbados Employers' Confederation and the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago. The surveys were conducted between April and May 2020, at a time when both countries were under a curfew and stay at home orders. The purpose of the surveys was to assess the needs of enterprises as a result of the COVID-19 crisis in order to guide EBMOs policy recommendations that respond to the actual needs of enterprises. All member enterprises were selected to participate in the surveys, with 121 belonging to the Barbados Employers' Confederation and 135 belonging to the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago actually responding. The surveyed enterprises employed between 10 and 250 workers and belonged to a range of sectors, including retail and sales, financial and insurance services, healthcare and tourism, energy, manufacturing, and information and communications.

Special attention for most Caribbean countries needs to be devoted to the evolution of production within the tourism industry(ies).¹¹ Comparing the 1Q of 2020 with the same period of 2019, international tourist arrivals declined by 39 per cent in the Caribbean and reported data for up to the month of June showed a 50 per cent decline due to the complete absence of travel in the region in April and May.¹² Such trends contributed to a reduction in the demand for tourism services. The impact of this on output is, however, hard to quantify considering the multiplier effects and the uneven restart of tourist inflows across the region since July 2020.¹³

In terms of employment, the industry(ies) provides direct employment to 413,000 workers. This figure represents, on average, 18.1 per cent of total employment.¹⁴ If indirect and induced employment is considered, such figures could rise to 43.1 per cent (with a distribution markedly skewed upward in tourism-dependent eastern Caribbean countries) - reaching up to 90 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda.¹⁵ Employment trends presented in the next section allow for partial conjecture about the actual impact of the crisis.

Trade. The negative trend in output is confirmed by trade data. ECLAC (2020: Table 2)¹⁶ reports estimate the year on year change in the value of goods exports for CARICOM States as -9.7 per cent for the period January - May 2020; -34.2 per cent for the month of April 2020; and -35.2 per cent up to the month of May 2020. Such decline follows an estimated 10.9 per cent contraction in 2019. At the same time, the collapse in tourism, constrained by social/physical distancing and travel restrictions, dragged down services exports for the Caribbean, where tourism accounted for 45 per cent of total exports of goods and services in 2019.¹⁷ Specifically, ECLAC (2020: Figure 10) projects a fall by 40 per cent in service exports in 2020.¹⁸

Public finances. In terms of public budget and fiscal space, Caribbean countries implemented a broad range of support measures, mostly, according to Reyes-Tagle et al. (2020), via containment-oriented funds used for current consumption rather than production, which entailed borrowing from the future to pay for transfers today. The latter should lead to a widening fiscal deficit from increased spending and reduced revenues.¹⁹ As examples, Saint Kitts and Nevis projected ECD188 million fallout in revenue over the first six months of this year as compared to the same period last year,²⁰ Grenada expects a 40 per cent or more in reduction on average in revenue collected by both the Inland Revenue and Customs Department and other areas of revenue eneration,²¹ forecasts for Barbados predict a -4.2 per cent reduction in fiscal revenue over GDP with respect to the pre COVID-19 forecast,²² Trinidad and Tobago - mostly impacted by the global fall in natural gas and oil

11 On average, in the Caribbean, the tourism industry directly contributes up to about 33 per cent of GDP with total GDP contributions reaching around 40 per cent in countries like Belize, Antigua and Barbuda, and The Bahamas, and as high as 73 per cent in the British Virgin Islands and Aruba. Tourism also accounts for over 52 per cent of export receipts (with the exceptions of the commodity-producing countries of the southern Caribbean, namely, Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, where tourism contributes an average of just 4.9 per cent in total to GDP).

12 UNWTO, 'World Tourism Barometer', World Tourism Organization 18, no. 2 (May 2020), and statement by the Caribbean Tourism Organization acting secretary general, Neil Walters reported on: 'C'bean countries record 50 per cent decline in visitor arrivals in first six months of 2020', Caribbean Business Report, 17 September 2020, sec. News.

13 In April 2020, researchers at the IDB conducted a simulation to estimate the impact of a 25, 50 and 75 per cent reduction in tourism arrivals on yearly GDP. The results of the simulation of the high-impact scenario of a 75 per cent reduction in tourism arrivals over the last three quarters of the year suggests that real output could fall relative to the pre-crisis baseline expectation by over 10 percentage points of real GDP in the case of The Bahamas, and by appreciable magnitudes also for Barbados and Jamaica. See Henry Mooney et al., 'Caribbean economies in the time of COVID', Caribbean quarterly bulletin (IDB, April 2020), 6-7.

14 The figures about employment in the tourism industries are drawn from estimates by the World Travel and Tourism Council presented in ILO (2020 d) 'Tourism sector in the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean: An overview and the impact of COVID-19 on growth and employment'. International Labour Organization, Office for the Caribbean - Port of Spain: ILO, 2020. The total presented are based on the identification of tourism industries, i.e. the cluster of production units in different industries that provide consumption goods and services demanded by visitors. Such clarification is important as there is no single ISIC (International standard classification of economic activities) industry which overlaps with the tourism one.

15 Tourism, traditionally a labour intensive industry, sees a predominance of female employment (between 50 and 60 per cent) with a non-negligible share of youth (10 to 20 per cent). Seasonality of arrivals and utilization of part-time employment or fixed-term employment is common but not universal across the region, while the utilization of a migrant labour force is a distinctive feature of the smallest island states and non-metropolitan territories (NMTs). Although data is scarce, available figures show that informal employment is, while perhaps less marked than in other sector of the economy, still accounting for over 40 per cent of total employment. This figure is particularly relevant considering cases where pre-existing social insurance measures are being relied upon to aid affected workers without new measures to catch those excluded.

16 ECLAC, 'The effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on international trade and logistics', Special report COVID-19, August 2020.

17 See IDB (2020) 'Trade trends estimates Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020 edition'.

18 ECLAC, 'The effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on international trade and logistics'.

19 Gerado Reyes-Tagle et al., 'COVID-19 in the Caribbean: The economic challenges ahead', Gestión Fiscal (blog).

20 See 'St. Kitts Government reports millions of dollars in lost revenue as a result of COVID', CARICOM Today (blog), 27 August 2020.

21 See Sheri-Kae McLeod, 'Grenada's Government revenue takes big hit from COVID-19', Caribbean National Weekly, 19 August 2020.

22 See IMF Country Report No. 20/192 available at <https://www.imf.org/-/media/Files/Publications/CR/2020/English/1BRBEA2020001.ashx>

prices - is projected to suffer a drop in revenue of about TTD9.2 billion leading to a fiscal deficit of 8.8 per cent of GDP as opposed with the initial one of 3.1 per cent of GDP,²³ while Jamaica has projected an 18 per cent decline in revenues.²⁴

Most countries of the region have already increased borrowing from International Financial Institutions (See Annex II). Interestingly enough however, IADB (2020a: 16) in a review of the impact of COVID-19 across selected Caribbean countries notes that the fiscal outlook is variable: "Some countries have relatively stronger medium-term fiscal frameworks,²⁵ which could help ease market concerns when deficits inevitably expand due to the fiscal cost of measures to combat the social and economic cost of the crisis. External finance from multilaterals can close financing gaps and relieve short-term liquidity concerns".

► B. Employment

The overall impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment in the Caribbean is difficult to gauge without consistently available hard data. Most countries in the region suspended regular household surveys while some shifted to telephone-administered versions. The often necessary move generated delays in data collection and gave rise to issues linked to quarter to quarter comparability.²⁶ The paragraphs below present some estimates and proxy indicators which may help to quantify such impact.

ILO modelled estimates

Global and regional trends. The sixth edition of the ILO Monitor issued in September 2020²⁷ highlights a few global trends with certain relevance for the Caribbean. These include:

- The overall share of workers residing in countries with workplace closures of some sort remains high. In the Caribbean, as of October 2020, virtually all countries maintain some degree of closure of businesses, although there is considerable variation. (See Annex I for full reopening calendar).
- Workplace closures continue to disrupt labour markets around the world, leading to working hour losses that are higher than previously estimated. The table below presents the estimates for the LAC region.
- The lost working-hours have translated into substantial losses in labour income (Table 2) in LAC, estimated at 10.1 per cent of GDP (against 10.7 per cent globally) during the first three quarters of 2020 (compared with the corresponding period in 2019).

23 See Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, '[2020 supplementary appropriation and mid-year review](#)', 12 June 2020.

24 See '[Jamaica slashes budget to meet J\\$120 billion COVID costs](#)', CARICOM, 18 May 2020.

25 These group includes Barbados, Jamaica, OECS countries and Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to The Bahamas and Suriname which present a more hazy outlook. See IDB (2020a) Caribbean quarterly bulletin 2020, 2. Henry Mooney and David Rosenblatt, '[The pandemic saga continues](#)', Caribbean Quarterly Bulletin (IDB, July 2020).

26 Notably with respect to assessing changes in key labour market indicators utilizing surveys conducted with different methods and samples (and a variable and potentially biased application of the rotation scheme).

27 See ILO, '[ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Sixth edition. Updated estimates and analysis](#)', 22 September 2020.

- COVID-19 and the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean labour market. A rapid assessment of impact and policy responses at the end of Q3, 2020

► **Table 2**

Labour income losses during the first three quarters of 2020 - Latin America and the Caribbean (USD and percentage)

	Labour income loss (billion US\$, 2019 value)	Labour income loss (percentage of labour income)	Labour income loss (percentage of GDP)
Americas	1,235	12.1	6.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	495	19.3	10.1

Source: ILO Monitor, September 2020

Caribbean trends. ILO modelled estimates presented in September 2020 suggest a gradual recovery for the labour market, although losses remain high. Table 3 presents the estimates of the working hours lost and the equivalent number of full-time jobs based on a 48 and 40 hours/week threshold.²⁸

► **Table 3**

Working-hour losses, Latin America and the Caribbean, first, second and third quarters of 2020 (percentage and full-time equivalent jobs)

Reference area	Percentage of working hours lost (%)			Equivalent number of full-time jobs (48 hours/week) lost (millions)		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q1	Q2	Q3
World	5.6	17.3	12.1	160	495	345
Latin America and the Caribbean	3.7	33.5	25.6	9	80	60
Caribbean ²⁸	2.4	21.8	12.8	0.36 0.43*	3.18 3.82*	1.87 2.25*

*Equivalent number of full-time jobs (40 hours/week) lost (millions)
Source: ILO elaboration

Data show that despite a reduction between the second and third quarter of 2020, the work hour losses are expected to remain high in the Q3 of 2020, at 12.8 per cent (in line with the global average of 12.1 per cent). This is, however, substantially lower than the combined average for the Latin America and Caribbean region (significantly skewed by the former) of 25.6. Similarly, 1.87 million full-time equivalent jobs²⁹ are expected to be lost in the Caribbean (against a total of 345 million FTE jobs worldwide and 60 million for the LAC region). There are two main explanations for this observed path: on the one hand the partial reopening of the tourism

²⁸ The Caribbean region considered by these ILO modelled estimates is different than the ensemble of English- and Dutch-speaking countries and territories and includes: The Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Saint Lucia, Saint and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States Virgin Islands. Notwithstanding the differences, a certain degree of comparability is warranted.

²⁹ The ILO estimates focus on the decline in hours worked and is estimated via a "nowcasting" model (See ILO 2020). The data are not based on more common - but less precise or completely unavailable, in the current context - labour market indicators such as the unemployment rate. While the full time equivalent employment losses are presented to illustrate the severity of the estimates of hours lost, the figures should not be interpreted as numbers of jobs actually lost nor increases in unemployment.

sector starting from June 2020 in certain countries provided immediate benefit in terms of increasing the hours worked and -most likely - the number of people employed. Secondly, the more or less concomitant relaxation of the strictest social distancing rules allowed for a partial recovery in internal demand/activity and some export oriented production, especially in commodity exporting countries.

Survey data

Comparing the above modelled estimates with evidence derived from (quarterly) labour force survey data (Table 4, Saint Lucia (Q1), Grenada (Q2) and Jamaica (Q3) generally confirms these findings,³⁰ specifically:

- Data show that the substantial drop in working hours seems to be reflected in a significant decline in the labour force participation rate (and a consequent increase in the inactivity rate) and the employment to population rate in the first (Saint Lucia), second (Grenada) and third (Jamaica) quarter of 2020 compared with the previous year.
- Depending on the country, men (Grenada) or women (Jamaica and Saint Lucia) appear to fare worse in terms of employment loss.³¹
- While both the level of people outside the labour force and of those unemployed increased, if head counting, the shift to outside the labour force seems to outweigh the shift to unemployment (Grenada and Jamaica)³² a pattern similar to that observed in Latin American countries (See Text Box 2) suggesting a substantial hindrance in the maintenance of economic activity and potential discouragement.

► Table 4

Key labour market indicators, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia, 2015 - Q3 2020

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (year average)	2019 by relevant quarter	Q1, 2020	Q2, 2020	Q3, 2020
Labour force participation rate									
Grenada	68.8	68.2	65.8	68.5	-	67.5 (Q2)	-	60.9	-
Men	74.5	73.3	71.3	74.1	-	71.2 (Q2)	-	64.2	-
Women	63.4	63.1	60.6	63.6	-	63.5 (Q2)	-	58.2	-
Jamaica^{e/}	63.1	64.8	65.1	64.0	64.6	65.2 (Jul)	65.6 (Jan)		61.3 (Jul)
Men	70.3	71.2	71.3	70.4	71.0	71.9 (Jul)	71.6 (Jan)	-	68.4 (Jul)
Women	56.3	58.6	59.1	57.9	58.5	58.8 (Jul)	59.8 (Jan)	-	54.5 (Jul)
Saint Lucia	72.2	72.8	71.4	71.4	71.0	71.5 (Q1)	69.9	-	-
Men	78.3	78.3	76.5	77.8	75.7	76.0 (Q1)	78.0	-	-
Women	66.0	67.4	66.8	65.2	66.5	67.4 (Q1)	62.2	-	-

³⁰ The three countries presented are the only ones to have published official data as of 22 October 2020. While they represent a small sample, Grenada and Saint Lucia may reasonably exemplify the situation for tourism oriented economies, while Jamaica may represent economies which combine tourism and other industries. It has to be noted, however, that for Saint Lucia, the data predominantly reflects developments in the labour market in January and February.

³¹ In Jamaica, the employment to population of women decreased slightly more on a yearly basis than that of men (-12.5 per cent vs -11.7 per cent) although males accounted for 53.8 per cent of the decrease in the employed labour force. See Statistical Institute of Jamaica Press Brief Labour Force Survey, July 2020.

³² Survey data show that in Jamaica there were an additional 80,600 person out of the labour force in July 2020, versus July 2020 and an additional 54,600 unemployed over the same time span. In Grenada, between Q2, 2019 and Q2, 2020, there were an additional 5,177 out of the labour force and an additional 4,444 unemployed.

► **Table 4 continued****Key labour market indicators, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia - 2015-Q3 2020**

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (year average)	2019 by relevant quarter	Q1, 2020	Q2, 2020	Q3, 2020
Employment to population rate									
Grenada	48.9	49.0	50.3	55.4	-	56.9 (Q2)	-	43.3	-
Men	55.2	54.5	56.6	62.8	-	62.6 (Q2)	-	43.7	-
Women	42.9	43.4	44.3	48.7	-	50.8 (Q2)	-	42.8	-
Jamaica	54.6	56.2	57.5	58.2	59.7	60.1 (Jul)	60.8 (Jan)	-	53.6 (Jul)
Men	63.3	64.3	65.2	65.6	66.9	67.7 (Jul)	67.4 (Jan)	-	-
Women	46.2	48.4	50.0	51.0	52.7	52.8 (Jul)	54.5 (Jan)	-	46.9 (Jul)
Saint Lucia	54.8	57.4	57.0	57.0	59.0	60.5	57.6	-	-
Men	61.6	63.1	62.9	63.4	64.4	66.6	67.1	-	-
Women	47.9	51.6	51.4	50.8	53.9	54.7	48.6	-	-
Unemployment rate									
Grenada	29.0	28.2	23.6	19.2	-	15.7 (Q2)	-	28.4	-
Men	26.0	25.6	20.6	15.2	-	12 (Q2)	-	26.1	-
Women	32.3	31.2	26.8	23.4	-	20 (Q2)	-	30.6	-
Jamaica	13.5	13.2	11.7	9.1	7.7	8.0	7.3 (Jan)	-	12.6 (Jul)
Men	9.9	9.6	8.4	6.7	5.8	6.1	5.9 (Jan)	-	11.5 (Jul)
Women	17.9	17.4	15.4	11.9	9.9	10.3	9.0 (Jan)	-	14.0 (Jul)
Saint Lucia	24.1	21.3	20.2	20.2	16.8	15.5	17.6	-	-
Men	21.3	19.4	18.1	18.5	14.9	12.4	14.0	-	-
Women	27.4	23.5	22.4	22.1	18.9	18.8	22.0	-	-

Source: ILO elaboration on the basis of data published by national statistical institutes. For 2020 data, the indicators come from Central Statistical Office Grenada; 2020 2nd quarter National Labour Force Survey Results Basic Tables, from the Central Statistical Office of Saint Lucia; Labour Force Survey 1st Quarter, 2020 Main Labour Force Indicators and from Statistical Institute of Jamaica – Labour Force Statistics <https://statinja.gov.jm/LabourForce/NewLFS.aspx>

Further analysis of the available data by country (not tabulated) allows suggesting some additional stylized facts.

Grenada (Q2, 2020)

- **Youth shifting out of the active labour force.** During Q2 of 2020 the participation rate of youth ages 15-24 showed a marked plunge (39.42 vs 51.4) with respect to the same quarter of 2019 and with respect to the adult (ages 25-64) one (77.7 vs 83.2). The COVID-19 crisis caused an increase in the economic inactivity rate for youth who gave up actively engaging in the search for employment or declaring themselves available

for employment. This is consistent with available evidence pointing at a more than proportional impact of the crisis on young workers who become the first to be dismissed in the event of a crisis.

- **Self-employment seeming to play a minor - if any - buffering role.** Data for Q2 of 2020 indicate a marked drop in both the number of employers (1,458) and own account workers (6,018) with respect to the previous years.³³ This seems to indicate that the shift to self-employment did not occur as a subsistence measure which is often the case during major economic downturns.
- **Expected losses in most sectors but gains in agriculture.** Industries which showed the largest decline in the relative employment share were, respectively, construction (-3.6 per cent over the average employment share from 2017-2019), accommodation and food services (-2.8 per cent),³⁴ transportation and storage, (-2.8 per cent) and manufacturing (-2.6 per cent). The main gainer was, conversely the agriculture, forestry and fishing industry (+5.1 per cent).³⁵ This is largely consistent with the risk profile elaborated by the ILO (See Figure 1) with the exception of the construction industry which may have suffered from interruptions due to the uncertainty in financing.
- **Long term unemployed still the bulk.** Amongst the people unemployed by Q2 2020, most were already unemployed for more than three months (> 80 per cent). The implication is that while the COVID-19 crisis did/will generate a change into the volume of people unemployed, its composition has to be remembered. Such volume will indeed include those who were already unemployed previous to the crisis and newly unemployed job seekers. This will generate not only an increase in the total number of jobseekers to potentially assist but will affect the capacity of Government to maintain some degree of labour market attachment for both categories and avoid more permanent or long lasting scarring effects.
- **Retention in the public administration seems to temper job losses.** Amongst the people unemployed by Q2 2020 most were largely employed respectively in wholesale and retail trade (14.9 per cent), construction (14.8 per cent) and accommodation and food services (10.4 per cent) while 11.1 per cent of them never worked. While such a situation mostly reflect the profile of the unemployed in the previous years, i.e. it is not necessarily COVID-19 specific, two changes are noteworthy: the increase in the share of people who were previously employed in wholesale and retail trade (9.7 per cent on average over the previous years versus 14.9 per cent in Q2 2020) and the decrease in the share of people who were previously employed in public administration (7.3 per cent in Q2 2020 versus 13.3 per cent on average over the past three years), hinting that the reduction in the turnover in public administration somehow played a support role during the COVID-19 crisis.

Jamaica (Q3 2020)

- **Huge increase in youth unemployment accompanied by shift out of the labour force.** Youth unemployment increased between July 2019 and July 2020 by over 50 per cent (20.2 vs 30.4 per cent). At the same time, however, the labour force participation rate of youth substantially declined by 10.9 per cent vs 11.9 per cent for the 15 to 19 age group, and 61.9 vs 68.7 for the 20 to 24 age group.
- **Low skill occupation seem to account for the biggest share of job losses.** The occupation group 'Elementary Occupations' (-29.9 per cent) and 'Service Workers and Shop and Market Sales Workers' (-15.6 per cent) lost the biggest share over total employment in July 2020 with respect to the same month in 2019. Such findings suggest an uneven impact of the pandemic on job losses with physical accessibility, possibility of remote work and skills profile playing a role in determining job attachment.

Saint Lucia (Q1 2020)

- **Spike in youth unemployment.** Youth unemployment spiked with respect to the average value for 2019 (31.6 per cent) to 37 per cent during the first quarter of 2020, suggesting that, at least during the first phase of the pandemic, most youth continued to actively look for employment.

³³ In 2017 there were, respectively 2,905 (employers) and 6,555 (own account workers); in 2018, 2,443 (employers) and 6,917 (own account workers).

³⁴ The sector was the target of a number of support measures including the extension of the small hoteliers' facility and, announcing at the beginning of the pandemic, earmarking of ECD20 million (USD7.4 million) worth of payroll support to the hoteliers, restaurants, bars, small travel agents and income support to public buses, taxi drivers, tourists vendors and other such identified hospitality-based businesses.

³⁵ The Government implemented a series of support measures to increase farm labour support to immediately boost agricultural production.

► Text box 2

Labour market information and collection from household surveys and administrative records in times of a pandemic

The restrictions on social mobility adopted as a health response to the pandemic in the countries of the region **have imposed significant challenges for collecting information via household and business surveys**. Most of the countries in the Caribbean region have - at the very least - interrupted the regular collection of data via household surveys, and in some cases, restarted them via telephone after necessary methodological adjustments were made.

Beyond the actual challenges in collection, there are certain interpretative aspects that must be taken into consideration when analyzing the data produced during the year. Firstly, because the collection of information has migrated from a face-to-face format to a telephone one, the results may not be strictly comparable with the historical series. In order to elucidate the existence or not of comparability problems, it would have been necessary to carry out simultaneous tests under both formats, which for obvious reasons - presence of the pandemic, with the consequent sanitary restrictions - was not possible. National statistical offices (NSOs) have warned their users that there may be difficulties in comparability with previous data. Secondly, switching to the telephone format using a sample of households from a previous period entails an additional complication related to the potential bias (whether of selection, coverage and / or lack of response) that may occur. The vast majority of the NSOs in the region have carried out studies and adjustments to minimize this potential bias.

From an interpretative standpoint, with respect to the labour indicators that are officially collected and published from ongoing surveys, it is important to point out the criteria used to classify people in the corresponding job categories. First of all, in a number of countries people may have continued to be employed³⁶ even if not physically at work³⁷ maintaining a certain minimum level of job attachment³⁸ but most likely altering the number of hours actually worked during the reference period. For orientation, the table below presents the evolutions of the main labour market indicators in the United States where a decrease in the employment rate was accompanied with a substantial increase in the unemployment rate, maintaining the participation rate more or less stable.

Evolution of main labour market indicators - USA - March to September 2020

Data series	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Participation rate, in %, seasonally adjusted	-	60.2	60.8	61.5	61.4	61.7	61.4
Unemployment rate, in %, seasonally adjusted	4.4	14.7	13.3	11.1	10.2	8.4	7.9
Employment - population ratio, in %, seasonally adjusted	-	51.3	52.8	54.6	55.1	56.5	56.6

Source: US Bureau of Labour Statistics Download 29-9 2020, last modified date: 14 October 2020

Thirdly, it is helpful to remember that to be classified as unemployed, it is necessary to be available in the reference period (week) and at the same time to have carried out an active job search - by any means - during said period. Therefore, in exceptional circumstances such as those that the region is experiencing due to the pandemic, it is expected that a very significant percentage of people who were previously in the workforce (both as employed or unemployed) will not be in a position to perform an active search due to confinement and social/physical distancing measures or simply because the assumption for them would be that no jobs were available thereby discouraging them from looking further. In this case, a substantial chunk of respondents may not be - since the pandemic kicked in, and especially during the

³⁶ As in persons who, in the referenced week / last seven days, were engaged in any activity to produce goods or provide services for pay or profit.

³⁷ Typically due to changes in working time arrangement (shift work, flexitime, remote work) or temporary absence (if the person expects to return within a short period).

³⁸ This is typically assessed after verifying the reason for absence, and for certain amongst them, the total duration of absence and the continued remuneration, and, under current circumstances, the economic situation faced by the economic units in which they work. Note that in Caribbean countries, the continued remuneration may be represented by benefits received by the workers via their employer but financed by the state.

► Text box 2 *continued*

early stages (Q1 and Q2 2020) - part of the economically active population and would rather become part of the population outside of the workforce. If they meet one of the criteria mentioned above - search or availability - they will be part of the "potential workforce". That is why, in general, very significant falls in the economic participation rate have been observed and it is expected that as the confinement measures are relaxed, some of these individuals will enter the economically active population again. The table below referring to Latin American Countries appears to showcase such trend.

Evolution of main labour market indicators: First semester 2019 - first semester 2020 for selected Latin American countries

Data Series	Average for Q1-Q2, 2019	Average for Q1-Q2, 2020
Participation rate, in per cent	62.1	56.9
Unemployment rate, in %	9.1	10.4
Employment-population ratio, in %	56.5	51.1

Source: ILO – SIALC based on information from household surveys of nine countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay)

It is thus essential that the analysis of the impacts of the pandemic goes beyond the traditional underutilization indicator, the unemployment rate. **This rate should be complemented with the study of the entire spectrum of classification categories that have been affected by the pandemic - for example, absent employed persons - and with all the indicators of underutilization of the workforce provided by international recommendations in the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS, 2013).** In these circumstances, the indicator that jointly considers the unemployed with the potential workforce - SU3 - or the indicator of underutilization by working time, is of special relevance. The opposite is expected when the path of gradual recovery of economic activity and employment begins: as health measures are relaxed and people are able to return to work or seek work, the category outside the labor force will decrease and unemployment rates will increase together with informal employment.

Fourthly, it is worth noting a trend data from the Latin American region appear to point out the massive loss of self-employment and informal jobs.³⁹ As paid employment falls, self-employment often plays a counter-cyclical role. In fact, this has been the case in recent years and in previous crises. However, this "traditional mechanism" weakens or disappears at this juncture, where these occupations, as well as informal wage earners, have been strongly affected.

In addition to the labour force or household surveys, administrative records may be a source of complementary information for labour market trends, especially in those countries where, due to the pandemic, measures have been implemented requiring registration in order to benefit from financial support (such as financial transfers similar in spirit to an actual unemployment insurance or health insurance) as is available in virtually all Caribbean countries.⁴⁰ In those cases, the information included in the administrative records may allow for the obtaining of information on workers suffering from various types of labour market detachment faster than that of the labour force surveys - especially if in the case of the surveys, information on fixed quarters is provided. Notwithstanding the above, administrative data also have some limitations in terms of scope and depth. They should provide information on formal employment (with limited exceptions) only and in some countries, on a part of the formal world, for example, the main sectors of activity of the private sector, the central government, companies with a number of workers above a certain threshold, etc. Likewise, there is often a lag in showing the short-term dynamics of employment since companies have a deadline to report the payroll of workers for whom they are contributing. This may imply a delay by two to three months in some countries, and up to six months in other cases, in order to have definitive records. However, when phenomena as acute as the effect of the current pandemic occur, the trend is clearly observable. Finally, administrative records could also have some limitations to the extent that they have been designed for other purposes such as, for example, auditing, and that they do not receive adequate treatment to generate statistical information. In this case, double counting may arise or the information may provide a general overview of the number of beneficiaries without being possible to further breakdown the data (by age, gender or type of occupation held).

³⁹ See ILO (2020b: 14). 'The Impact on the labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean | Technical note Second edition'.

⁴⁰ Interesting to note the Aruba case where the Labour and Research Department is collecting information on employment terminations since January 2020 by asking those terminated to register with them, is somehow becoming a separate and specialized register to guide policy making.

Trends in employment by industry. ILO (2020c)⁴¹ produced a summary estimate of the expected risks that workers are confronted with depending on the industry of employment. The high-risk group includes severely affected sectors that have been experiencing steep falls in their production levels, for instance, accommodation and food services, or retail and wholesale trade. The workers in these sectors are exposed to a higher probability of losing their jobs, facing cut wages, or reduced hours of work. At the other extreme, the low-risk group includes public administration, education services, and health services, which have maintained - or even in some cases increased - their activity levels. The assessment is based on several parameters including initial employment levels,⁴² possibility for telework, path in worldwide demand and real-time economic and financial data collected during Q1 and Q2 2020.

While such estimate was intended to cover the entire world, it is helpful to refer to it in the Caribbean context. First, it allows to have a better idea of which industries in the region may have been hardest hit during Q1 and Q2. On the other hand, such assessment of the risk may help with identifying which industries may be most susceptible to a second dip in case the pandemic situation worsens and/or additional mobility restrictions measures are enacted. Important to note, however, as data for Q2 2020 from Grenada presented above indicate, national policies as the one to support agricultural production may substantially alter the scenario suggested as employment retention or generation can be significantly affected by the type and size of support measures enacted at the national level. In order to do so, Figure 1 presents a breakdown of employment for the Caribbean region (according to ILO modelled estimates - CARICOM region - for 2020) and corresponding level of risk. The main employer in the region, 'wholesale and retail trade' (17.6 per cent of total employment) is identified as an industry at high risk, agriculture and fisheries (11.1 per cent) presented a medium risk, other services (10.7 per cent) including arts, entertainment and recreation, and activities of households as employers of domestic personnel are at medium/high risk, construction (10.2 per cent) at medium risk, and accommodation and food services (8.7 per cent) at high risk.

► Figure 1

Breakdown of employment in the CARICOM region (per cent of total employment) and level of risk by industry (ISIC classification, Q1-Q2 2020)



Source: ILO Modelled estimates, November 2019, - series: employment distribution by economic activity, by sex - for breakdown of employment by industry in the CARICOM region (downloaded from [ILOSTAT](https://ilostat.ilo.org/): 16-10-2020) and ILO (2020) 'ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition' for the assessment of the level of risk).

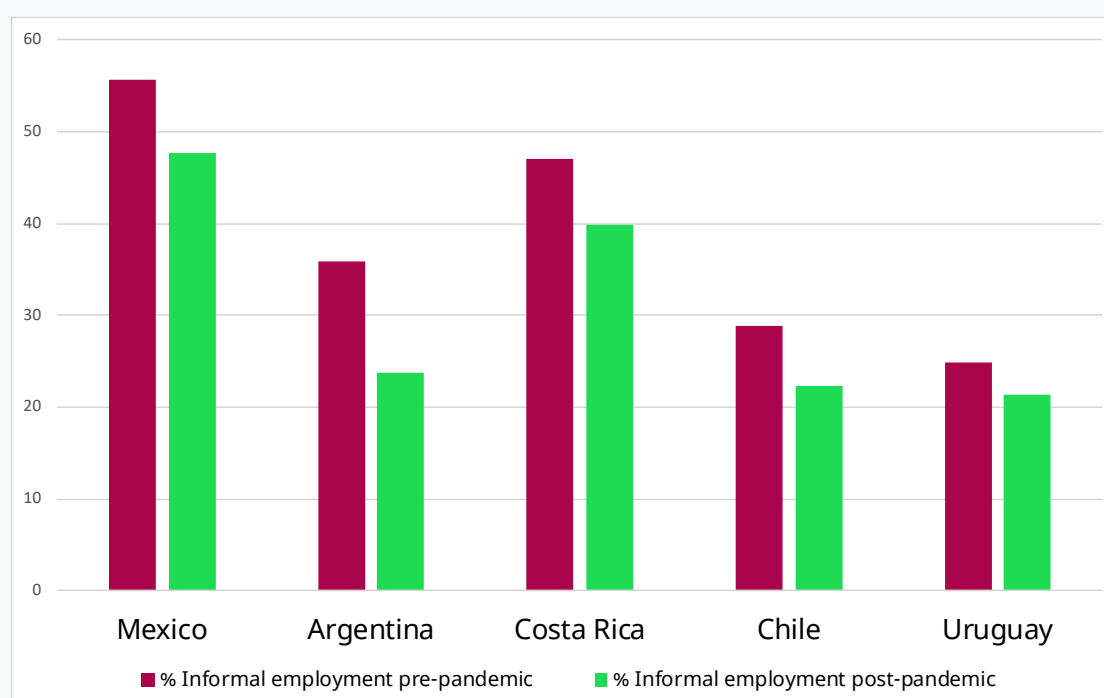
⁴¹ See ILO, 'ILO monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Second edition. Updated estimates and analysis', accessed 13 October 2020.

⁴² Not to be forgotten is that maintaining the job may come at the price of demand for longer and more extraordinary working hours (e.g. education professionals who had to adopt had to adopt new pedagogical strategies very quickly), but also significant risks of contracting COVID-19 at your workplace (e.g. health workers).

Informal employment and administrative records. While no actual data are available to determine the impact of the crisis on informal employment, it is possible that this incidence, impacting Caribbean labour markets to variable extents during pre COVID-19 times⁴³, has increased. In the absence of full or sizable income replacement or in the presence of inadequate social protection or enterprise support systems, many people have likely resorted to making a living as informal microbusiness owners, own-account workers, or simply, informal employees. At the same time, in an effort to cut expenditures and guarantee survival, or simply pushed by competition of more solid and bigger companies, some formal micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) may have been pushed into informality. Such perhaps logical and historically common developments, however, do not find confirmation in hard data from Latin America. As shown in Figure 2, the rate of informality has fallen (temporarily) in all countries where information is available, in the context of the widespread collapse in labour demand.

► **Figure 2**

Change in informal employment rate during 2020 for selected Latin American countries (in percentage)*



*The blue bars reflect the situation before COVID-19, while the red bars reflect the situation immediately after. Argentina considers only salaried workers.
Source: ILO 2020b, Figure 11

To illustrate potential variation in the level of informal employment and complement the limited survey based data on labour market indicators, Table 5 presents the percentage year to year change in active contributors to social security systems broken down by employment status in selected Caribbean countries.

⁴³ ILO (2017) in an analysis of Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, reports incidence of informal employment varying between 5.5 per cent in Barbados to 52.6 per cent in Guyana and the contribution of the informal economy to GDP varying between 30 and 50 per cent depending on the country. See Informality and economic units in the Caribbean, International Labour Organization, Office for the Caribbean - Port of Spain: ILO, 2017.

► **Table 5**

Percentage of year to year change in active contributors to social security systems broken down by employment status, for selected Caribbean countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, and Turks and Caicos)

Country	Categories	Year to year % change, Jan 2019 - Jan 2020	Year to year % change, Feb 2019 - Feb 2020	Year to year % change, Mar 2019 - Mar 2020	Year to year % change, Apr 2019 - Apr 2020	Year to year % change, May 2019 - May 2020	Year to year % change, Jun 2019 - Jun 2020	Year to year % change, Jul 2019 - Jul 2020	Year to year % change, Aug 2019 - Aug 2020	% year to year decrease	% change
Antigua and Barbuda	Active employers	-13.0	-18.2	-40.7	-64.7	-63.6	-86.7				-0 to -10 %
	Male employees insured	-12.4	-11.9	-31.0	-52.1	-55.8	-67.6				-10 to -20 %
	Female employees insured	-9.0	-9.1	-28.0	-46.6	-49.1	-60.7				-20 to -30 %
	Male own account workers/self-employed insured	-20.1	-26.3	-47.0	-60.6	-54.0	-52.3				-30 to -40 %
	Female own account workers/self-employed insured	-12.8	-17.6	-37.4	-52.9	-49.9	-44.7				-40 to -50 %
Belize	Active employers	-2.2	-4.5	-13.2	-39.3	-29.8	-27.8	-27.7	-31.0		-50 to -60 %
	Male employees insured	-0.3	-0.4	-3.3	-21.7	-17.1	-15.9	-16.9	-17.8		> -60 %
	Female employees insured	2.7	1.1	-2.8	-24.9	-21.7	-18.9	-18.5	-19.9		
	Male own account workers/self-employed insured	3.3	-1.1	-23.5	-33.6	-29.9	-30.9	-34.1	-34.2	% year to year increase	% change
	Female own account workers/self-employed insured	11.5	7.0	-13.7	-21.0	-20.5	-19.0	-22.8	-24.7		
Turks and Caicos	Active employers	-19.3	-27.5	-42.7	-67.2	-60.2	-67.1				0 to 10 %
	Male employees insured	-3.8	-5.6	-15.1	-37.3	-57.3	-84.9				10 to 20 %
	Female employees insured	-6.6	-9.3	-18.9	-36.9	-66.3	-86.8				
	Male own account workers/self-employed insured	-26.6	-29.9	-48.1	-68.0	-76.8	-86.2				
	Female own account workers/self-employed insured	-21.8	-30.1	-48.6	-71.6	-81.1	-91.1				

Source: ILO calculations based on data collected from social security institutions

Notwithstanding the fact that the figures present some interpretative challenges⁴⁴ there are insightful common trends emerging from the data:

- There has been a marked drop in number of active employers, salaried workers and own account workers starting with the month of March 2020, not recovered since for all three countries. Depending on the country and category of worker, such drop was at times compounded through June 2020 (August 2020 for Belize). This is consistent with the employment data and the general drop in economic activity presented in the above sections. The absence of recovery for Belize could at least in part be associated with the delay in restarting the tourism activity with respect to other insular countries.
- A largely similar drop in actively contributing salaried workers by gender, hinting that there does not seem to be substantial difference in vulnerability. However, for own account workers, the drop in male contributors is more marked than for female contributors in both Antigua and Barbuda and Belize (while the opposite is true for Turks and Caicos).

Another set of administrative records available for Trinidad and Tobago indicate that the Ministry of Labour Ministry received 2,262 retrenchment notices from January to October (of which 1,207 were for August alone), a figure corresponding to 0.3 per cent of the total employed population (according to the total from the ILOSTAT modelled estimates) but which exceeded the annual figure for the last five years.⁴⁵ The retail, wholesale and restaurant sectors accounted for about one fifth of those.

Overall, the previous analysis seems to confirm the worldwide trends in employment and give a resounding alert to the risk that workers, who were previously actively contributing to the insurance funds, face of becoming jobless or informally employed (whether with the original employer/activity or a new one).⁴⁶

The shift to informal employment, if actually confirmed, casts some questions on the degree of coverage by alternative social assistance measures in the immediate aftermath of the cessation of active contribution but, also importantly, in the medium term. If on the one hand income support may be available, it is legitimate to question whether workers who stopped contributing will restart doing so, when would that happen and, more importantly, what could be done to facilitate the process. The section on policy analysis tries to address these pending questions.

Poverty and inequality. The discussion on the increase in the relative incidence of informal employment and the shift in labour market status from employment to unemployment, from employment to out of the labour force, and from full-time employment to part-time employment depicted above has some deeper and intrinsic implications for poverty. An online survey covering 14,000 households, conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank in April 2020⁴⁷ across six countries from the region, confirms that job losses seem to disproportionately affect households that earned below the minimum wage in January 2020 (in both commodity- and tourism-dependent countries). As a consequence, the report of the survey results⁴⁸ provides a few meaningful insights:

- During the first six weeks of the pandemic, household incomes fell, and the number of vulnerable households increased rapidly. The losses - including remittances - were common across the distribution, but particularly so for lower-earning households. The percentage of Caribbean households with incomes below the minimum wage increased from 19.9 per cent in January 2020 to about 45.5 per cent in April 2020. To complement such findings, it is helpful to report the results of the Q2 labour force survey in Grenada: answering a specific question, 70 per cent of respondents indicated no change in the usual income received, while 17 per cent indicated receiving less than half of their usual income.
- Vulnerable households found it challenging to cover basic needs. On average across the region, 34.4 per cent of households earning below the minimum wage reported experiencing hunger, while 51.9 per cent of them

44 Any downward change in the total number of active contributors may be due to cessation of employment or, simply be due to delays in payment. The latter are to be expected in the current situation and, in some cases, are even allowed within the framework of COVID-19 relief measures. For example, in the case of Belize, employers and self-employed workers were allowed to delay beginning of payment for two months and start to pay in July 2020 (in instalments, should they wish so), without penalties. Note, however, that they maintained the obligation to continue filing returns with information about employees and contributions.

45 Note that in the country, retrenchment notices to the Ministry of Labour are due in case retrenchment of five or more workers by a single employer and that the Ministry himself noted the quoted figure may underestimate the actual total. See: Gail Alexander, 'Minister confirms 2,262 lost jobs, but it could be more', Trinidad and Tobago Guardian, 13 October 2020.

46 Contribution to social security is the main criterion utilized to determine informal or formal nature of employment for salaried workers.

47 May and June in the case of Suriname.

48 See Maricruz Arteaga Garavito, Diether Beuermann, and Laura Giles Álvarez, 'COVID-19: The Caribbean crisis: results from an online socioeconomic survey' (Inter-American Development Bank, August 2020).

reported deleterious changes in their diet relative to the pre-pandemic period. It is interesting in this case as well to look at the Grenada result where 72.7 per cent of the respondents to the Q2 labour force survey indicated no sacrifices in terms of number of meals consumed by household members; the remaining indicated some sort of shortage.

- Between January and April 2020, the coverage of social assistance programmes increased from 22.6 per cent to 27.9 per cent among low-income households, and from 17.1 per cent to 21.1 per cent for households that earned above the minimum wage.⁴⁹ Although partial, data in Annex III suggest that COVID-19 specific relief measures covered from a minimum of 2.3 per cent of the population (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) to a maximum of 37.3 per cent (Saint Kitts and Nevis) playing a crucial role in supporting aggregate demand. Additionally, the results from additional COVID-19 specific questions added to the labour force survey held in Q2 2020 in Grenada are helpful. Ninety per cent of respondents indicated they did not apply for any additional employment insurance benefit to which they were potentially entitled. In a follow up question, 77 per cent of them mentioned not being aware as the main reason for not applying.

The above seems to confirm that the COVID-19 induced recession may have some regressive impact. Such impact is also analyzed, on the basis of available data from Latin American countries, by ILO (2020b)⁵⁰ which mentions as one of the most salient differences in this crisis with respect to previous ones, the fact that there seems to be clear demarcation between individuals and families who continue to receive all or part of their income and those who do not. The latter may not only have lost their jobs but may also be still employed and absent from their jobs without pay, especially the self-employed, or are receiving only partial pay due to reduced working hours.

The immediate consequence of this polarization of labour market performance and consequent income inequalities is the need to appropriately target response measures not only, as a priority, in terms of access to health care and income support, but also in terms of maintenance of labour market attachment and/or development and revamping of human capital for the most disadvantaged and currently excluded shares of the population. Looking at the mid-term scenarios and conscious of the high youth unemployment rates in the Caribbean - often linked to questioning quality or relevance of the education received - such issues become paramount to avoid having to cope with a substantial number of youth who may join the ranks of the unemployed if their future educational attainment is below par. By the same token, cross cutting dimensions such as gender, race and ethnicity may have to become key elements in the design of suitable responses. Last but not least, a note is to be made with respect to those who were previously informally employed. It is safe to assume that the actors in the informal economy have been affected - irrespective of their current employment status - more than proportionally by the crisis with the immediate loss of revenue compounded by the generally lower earnings and/or the absence of savings or other financial cushion. The analysis in Part 2 will shed some additional light on some of these aspects.

49 id, foreword, 1

50 See ILO (2020) 'Technical note X: Labour overview in times of COVID-19. Impact on the labour market and income in Latin America and the Caribbean' | Second edition, September, 2020

► Part 2: Policy responses

Countries have taken unprecedented measures to combat the spread of the disease, while mitigating its pernicious effect on the economy and labour market. The present section summarizes the type and extent of the policy response in the Caribbean region by breaking them down into three tables: those directly (or mainly) addressing individuals (including own account workers), those targeting businesses/employers and other relevant measures pertaining to monetary policy, social dialogue, actions by employers' and workers' organizations, and visa policy.⁵¹

► Support measures to individuals, households and the self-employed

Tax relief (Waiver or deferral or reduction of payments) and waiver or deferral of other fees and penalties, and loan payments. All of the countries in this analysis except Curaçao and the Cayman Islands offered some form of tax relief directed towards members of the public (See Table 6: first and second columns). Relief packages directed to the general public tended to include - individually or combined - duty and tax reductions (especially on medical supplies and sanitary items), suspension of value-added tax (VAT) on specific purchases (such as 'back-to-school' VAT holiday on school supplies in The Bahamas or waiver of VAT on laptops, notebooks and tablet devices in Trinidad and Tobago), and suspension of property tax. Where salaried workers were the intended targets, policies generally took the form of a deferral in filing of income tax/payroll tax, reduction in income tax/payroll tax or waiver of duties for items that were direct inputs in the production process. Interestingly, in Bermuda and Grenada, these benefits were limited to a particular sector. In Bermuda, payroll tax was set at a zero rate for restaurants and bars while poultry farmers in Grenada received a complete waiver on duties for two shipments of feed. In almost all of the countries where some form of tax relief was granted, the public also benefited from policies that reduced, waived or deferred other financial fees and penalties as well (other types of financial exemptions). Grenada and Sint Maarten were the only two countries not to extend this allowance. Furthermore, Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were the only two countries offering sector specific consideration, with the agricultural sector⁵² a target for both.

Direct cash transfers, salary relief or government stipend. Relative to the tax targeting measures, there was less discretion in the offer of direct cash transfers and government stipends, with every single country offering this type of relief to the public, making it the most widely adopted policy response. In general, two types of reliefs were offered: those for persons whose employment was affected by the pandemic, and those more generally targeting the poor and vulnerable (Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago). The latter included an increase in the amount of benefits and/or adding new beneficiaries to usually dispatched benefits.⁵³ Of the twenty-two other countries, over half specified transfers for employees in the tourism and hospitality industry, eight specified payments to workers in the agricultural sector, and six identified members of the entertainment industry for receipt of government approved salary relief.⁵⁴ Coverage of these programmes was also quite expansive as over 60 per cent offered extended provisions to self-employed/own account workers.

51 The reference for this exercise is the ILO inventory of COVID-19 Country policy responses: '[Country policy responses \(COVID-19 and the world of work\)](#)', accessed 13 October 2020. Interested reader may find additional details in the hyperlink herein.

52 For the purposes of this report, agriculture includes traditional farming of animals (animal husbandry) and plants (agronomy, horticulture and forestry in part), as well as forestry and fisheries.

53 For instance, cash transfers in Suriname were intended for anyone who qualified as "the most vulnerable" while Anguilla offered assistance to persons who had never even made contributions to social security. In the latter case, though there was no limitation in number of grants available, earnings prior to the pandemic would affect the size of the grant received (Workers earning less than ECD800 would be given the amount needed to bring them up to ECD800 per month while persons who earned less than ECD800 before the crisis will only be given the amount necessary to bring them up to that pre-crisis level).

54 While special note is made of support to these specific sectors, there were no instances where they were the only industries to benefit from direct cash transfers.

► Table 6

Mapping of government support measures to individuals, households and the self-employed

Country ⁵⁵	Tax relief (Waiver or deferral of payments) & reductions	Reduction, waiver or deferral of other fees and penalties, and loan payments	Direct cash transfers, salary relief or Gov. stipend	Food assistance	Utility assistance/ discounts/ waivers/ deferrals	Skills training	Pension holidays/ vacations	Home refurbishment/ home ownership loans or projects	New/ additional public employment programmes	Facilitation of employment retention for salaried workers	Protection of workers in the workplace				
											OSH related measures	New work arrangements including via revised legislation	Prevention of discrimination and exclusion including via revised legislation	Regulation of access to paid leave including via revised legislation	Regulation of access to health care
AIA	X	X	X	X	X					X					X
ATG	X	X	X (TO)	X	X	X (TO)*				X (O)	X	X		X	X
ABW	X	X	X *	X	X					X	X	X		X	X
BHS	X	X	X *	X	X	X (AO)				X	X	X			X
BRB	X	X	X (TO)*	X	X	X (TO)		X		X (T)	X	X	X	X	X
BLZ	X	X	X (TAO)*	X	X					X	X	X		X	X
BMU	X (T)	X	X *		X	X	X			X	X				X
BVI	X	X	X (AO) *	X	X			X		X	X	X			X
CYM			X (TEAO) *	X	X		X *				X	X		X	X
CUW			X(TEAO)*	X						X		X			
DMA	X	X	X (AO)*							X	X	X			X
GRD	X (A) *		X (TAO)*	X	X						X	X			
GUY	X	X	X	X		X (O)				X (H)	X	X	X		
JAM	X	X (ATO)*	X (TEAO) *	X	X	X (TO) *				X (TO)	X	X		X	X
MSR	X	X	X (TAO) *	X	X	X (T) *					X	X		X	X
KNA	X	X	X (TO)*	X	X			X		X	X	X			
LCA	X	X	X (TEAO)*	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X

► Table 6 continued

Country	Tax relief (Waiver or deferral of payments) & reductions	Reduction, waiver or deferral of other fees and penalties, and loan payments	Direct cash transfers, salary relief or Gov. stipend	Food assistance	Utility assistance/ discounts/ waivers/ deferrals	Skills training	Pension holidays/ vacations	Home refurbishment/ home ownership loans or projects	New/ additional public employment programmes	Facilitation of employment retention for salaried workers	Protection of workers in the workplace					
											OSH related measures	New work arrangements including via revised legislation	Prevention of discrimination and exclusion including via revised legislation	Regulation of access to paid leave including via revised legislation	Regulation of access to health care	
VCT	X	X (AO)	X (TEAOE)*	X	X				X		X	X		X	X	
SXM	X		X *	X	X					X	X		X		X	
SUR	X	X	X	X	X	X (A) *		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TTO	X	X	X (EnO)*	X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TCA	X	X	X (TO) *	X	X					X	X			X	X	



Intended for the general public



Intended for salaried workers, recently salaried workers or persons who've experience a reduced income

* Includes special provisions for self-employed persons/own account workers

Industries intended to directly benefit from policies: Tourism/Hospitality: T, Entertainment/Culture/Arts: En, Agriculture/Fisheries: A, Manufacturing-M, Health-H, Construction-C, Other-O

Note:** The Bahamas offers free online job training and certification by the National Training Agency for a summer cohort of students (255) to help them function effectively in the COVID-19 era. "This is alongside efforts for salaried workers in the Tourism and Education Sector

Food and utility assistance. Food and utility assistance was offered to the general public in every country. Food assistance - itself the second most widely adopted relief measure - generally involved the provision of food hampers (such as with Turks and Caicos and Montserrat), price regulation to ensure continued accessibility of basic food items (Aruba and Barbados), or the distribution of food vouchers/stipend (as seen in The Bahamas and Cayman Islands). Some countries (for example Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago) used a combination of listed policy options as a form of food security mitigation. In comparison, utility assistance was mostly provided in the form of a temporary suspension from disconnection for subscribed services. There were, of course, exceptions. For example, Saint Lucia offered full payment of electricity bills to persons affected by the crisis, Belize offered a reduction in rates, while both Saint Kitts and Nevis and the British Virgin Islands granted a payment amnesty for a specified period of time.

Pension holidays/vacations, home refurbishment/ home ownership loans or projects, new/ additional public employment programmes. Pension holidays, home ownership/refurbishment loans, and new public employment programmes were the least employed strategies to mitigate the impact of the crises with only two countries (Bermuda and Cayman Islands) adopting the first strategy, four employing the second (Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Suriname) and two (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia) adopting the third. With regards to public employment programmes, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has already dedicated 30 million ECD (USD11.1 million) for immediate jobs in public works schemes (roads and buildings programmes; other physical facilities; second phase of Pedestrian Access for Village Enhancement Programme (PAVE); painting of some Government buildings, etc.). In Saint Lucia, two new public employment programmes were included in the workfare programme, namely the Rural Community Small Project Economic Stimulation Initiative and the National School Leavers Programme. The National School Leavers Programme aims to ensure that young people are engaged productively and will include national service, volunteerism, youth entrepreneurship and other employment initiatives. The Programme will cost ECD1.3 million (Approximately USD481,000) and the official beneficiary will be displaced workers and young school leavers. Meanwhile, the Rural Community Small Projects Economic Stimulation Initiative seeks to stimulate rural economic activity through a series of small construction projects geared at renovating existing community facilities, which is expected to translate into increased income support to rural households. The Project is set to cost ECD4.0m (USD1.48 million).

Skills training. Another way that governments across the region have responded to the pandemic is by providing skills training to mitigate the impact on the labour market and to help position employable workers with skills necessary to function in the new status quo. Despite the relative importance of this step, only nine countries have made such arrangements. Unsurprisingly, about half of these focus on skills training for persons in the tourism and hospitality sector (with three including self-employed / own account workers for training). Other areas of focus include upskilling efforts in the education sector to ensure teachers are able to successfully adapt to online instruction and training for persons involved in the agricultural sector to improve agricultural production to sustain food security. Notably, most of these programmes are designed for salaried workers or persons whose incomes were disrupted because of COVID-19. Saint Lucia and The Bahamas are two exceptions as they both specifically provide training in digital economy and information technology for young persons to ensure that they have workforce-ready digital skills to function in the COVID-19 era (Note, The Bahamas does this alongside upskilling efforts for salaried workers).⁵⁶ Belize's unemployment relief coverage also included persons who were unemployed prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for them, further referral to the Ministry of Human Development for consideration for further assistance through the social programmes, was included in the portfolio of measures.

⁵⁶ Though not included in the analysis or table summary, The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has partnered with Coursera to offer the Workforce Recovery Initiative to unemployed citizens across the Commonwealth.

► Text box 3

The impact of COVID-19 on the delivery of technical and vocational education and training

The 1990 CARICOM Regional Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) recommendation on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for distance delivery of instruction was aimed at providing access and improving the quality of TVET. Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic, the ILO undertook a survey of eleven National Training Agencies / TVET Councils to assess the extent to which such strategy had been implemented and the readiness of national institutions for distance delivery of instruction.⁵⁷ The results showed a weak resilience of the vocational training systems to maintain continuity of delivery of instruction. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents do not use any form of ICT for the delivery of instruction at a distance, while 47 per cent of the respondents indicated moderate use of ICT for delivery of instruction via distance learning. Among the major issues inhibiting the use of ICT for design and delivery of instruction are the lack of, or limited knowledge and use of the Learning Management System (LMS), and access to computers and the internet. Other challenges include assessment of students' learning, lack of partnership and limited funding to maintain continuity of delivery, as well as the lack of training for instructors/students on the use of the ICT resources for distance learning.

The above not fully encouraging outlook is, however, to be weighted upon few local initiatives undertaken in response to the pandemic during the second and third quarter of 2020. In August 2020 the National Training Agency of The Bahamas launched a free online job training and certification in office procedures, information technology, Microsoft Office, graphic design and web design for a summer cohort of students (255) to help them function effectively in the COVID-19 era. In Guyana, the newly approved budget in September 2020 introduced teacher education/virtual teaching training programme to the benefit of TVET educators. In addition, measures were put in place in the budget to ensure expanded access to the internet for the general population. Lastly, the Jamaica The Human Employment and Resource Training Trust/National Training Agency (HEART Trust/NTA) announced that for the October reopening it will move towards blended learning model with a combination of face-to-face and online learning. To conclude, it should be noted that the ILO has forged a partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Partnerships and the National Training Initiative of Barbados to provide online training in the areas of core skills, occupational safety and health, and entrepreneurship to address those who lost their jobs during the pandemic (more than 650 participants registered).

Employment retention measures. All but four countries developed workable strategies to reduce the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic on the workforce by facilitating employment retention for salaried workers. In general, this took place through: (i) business support initiatives like salary subsidies or deferrals on payments of tax or social security contributions (see next section on business support measures) or (ii) government led and private sector implemented recommendation on how to address reduction in economic activity via austerity measures such as the reduction in working hours and/or days worked or in the worst case, resort to temporary termination (e.g. Belize, Jamaica, Suriname). Beyond those, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos, however, utilized measures outside of those strategies. For instance, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda committed to not laying off public service workers, the Guyanese Government introduced risk allowances for frontline workers to discourage attrition, and the Surinamese Ministry of Labour opened an email account for workers who have complaints or have been made redundant for any reason with the aim to deter employers from unjustly releasing staff. In a particularly innovative step, the British Virgin Islands developed a City Park and Ride Shuttle Service, paying taxi operators to operate free shuttles in a dual attempt to create a "Pedestrian Friendly Road Town" and protect drivers from job loss.

⁵⁷ See ILO 'The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of TVET in CARICOM Member States', International Labour Organization, Office for the Caribbean - Port of Spain: ILO, 2020.

Protection of workers in the workplace. New OSH measures were almost universally adopted. Most countries relied on safety protocols (often sector specific), government guidelines, post inspection certification or a combination of these options to ensure safety in the workplace. Changes to statutory written government regulations were rare, though this occurred in Saint Kitts Nevis, Sint Maarten and Trinidad and Tobago. Nevertheless, there were no changes in legislation related to telework.⁵⁹ On the other hand, no government relied solely on loose recommendations (though this sometimes accompanied weightier measures). Similarly, barring four countries, all other governments announced measures to support new work arrangements (the most frequent arrangement was the promotion of technology and online platforms to facilitate remote work). In most instances, the decision to adopt new work arrangements was left to employers but in some instances, changes were obligated. For instance, Antigua and Barbuda stipulated that all retail businesses switch to curbside pickup, takeaway or delivery as of 22 April 2020, Barbados required the closure of all businesses unless employees were able to work from home during the Emergency Management (COVID-19) period, and schools across the region were required to switch to online learning.

With regards to preventing discrimination and exclusion of workers, only Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago introduced COVID-19 specific responses intended to protect workers. In all the three other countries where COVID-19 anti-discrimination policies were adopted, two - Guyana and Sint Maarten - focused on providing relief to members of the public experiencing gender-based violence as a result of lockdowns, while Barbados focused on protecting the identity of persons in quarantine and self-isolation.

Though more countries made a greater effort to regulate access to paid leave, less than half of those observed employed such measures. In contrast, every country except Curaçao, Grenada, Guyana and Saint Kitts and Nevis made efforts to regulate health care so that coverage was either more expansive or more efficient. In most instances, this took the form of a government created hotline where members of the public would be able to report symptoms, inquire about treatment options or just gain general knowledge. Notably, several countries provided a hotline to address the mental health concerns of members of the public who would have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Support measures to individuals, households and the self-employed have been diverse and the portfolio quite varied across countries. For instance, Curaçao adopted four of the policy categories under consideration while Barbados adopted thirteen. While this discrepancy is not indicative, per se, of actual coverage and depth of relief for the beneficiary population and may be due to differences in population sizes as well as available revenue, it is worth noting it to the extent that differences in number of policy measures requires a different commitment of resources at the very least from an administrative standpoint.

The overall descriptive analysis presented in the above paragraphs warrants some further considerations. Specifically, four common trends are worth highlighting:

1. Despite the widespread utilization of direct cash transfers, the amount dispatched per individual measure is generally insufficient to ensure a minimal living wage. Combinations of different benefits and support and addition of those between different members of the same household contributed more substantially to alleviate the strains on most vulnerable households. Overall, it has to be emphasized that benefits were meant to be emergency relief measures to guarantee survival. Countries' narrow fiscal space is the main reason behind such choices.
2. Targeting of relief measures followed some specific blueprints. Most of the measures targeting workers were aimed at those belonging to the formal economy prior to the COVID-19 crisis with almost every country (except for three) making special allowances for self-employed/own account workers. In general, the requirement of the registration to national insurance schemes as a prerequisite to access benefits, limited the access for most workers in the informal economy. In addition, an overwhelming majority of countries provided income support to workers who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic as well as those who experienced a reduced income.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ While social distancing protocols were likely implemented for businesses, no specific information concerning OSH measures was found for Anguilla and Curaçao.

⁵⁹ To be noted, however, that in The Bahamas, Grenada, and Saint Kitts and Nevis: Emergency Powers Acts or Statutory Rules and orders encouraged / allowed and in some case (early lockdowns) mandated non-exempted businesses to continue to operate with employees working from home.

⁶⁰ In fact, only The Bahamas and Curaçao clearly reserved these cash subsidized for persons experiencing job loss due to the crisis. The other countries - barring Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Montserrat for which no explicit distinction was made - attached no such limitations.

3. Nevertheless, it is also true that workers in the informal economy potentially benefitted through two channels: on the one hand, they were eligible, not as workers but as citizens to non-contributory benefits targeting the general population. On the other hand, innovative conditions were adopted in at least eight countries (Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago) to provide some alternatives. For example, persons did not require either to be affiliated to the social insurance or have paid social security contributions to be entitled to temporary unemployment assistance in Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia and The Bahamas and a public assistance grant was available for self-employed persons who do not contribute to national insurance in Trinidad and Tobago. Still on targeting, while sector specific measures were sometimes adopted (e.g a separate window within the CARE Programme to cater to persons with disabilities in Jamaica), there was not much focus on other cross-sections of the labour market (for example, policies specific to women or young people).

► Text box 4

The role of social security organizations in the administration of COVID-19 related financial benefits

Virtually all the Caribbean countries have proceeded to administer exceptional financial relief measures via their social security organizations. This happened irrespectively of whether those transfers were contributory unemployment insurance schemes (The Bahamas and Barbados) or direct non-contributory subsidies labelled in various ways “unemployment relief”, “financial assistance”, “grant”. Such implementation mechanism was chosen to take advantage of the existing administrative databases apt to facilitate urgent financial disbursement. Despite the pre-existence of most components, a few challenges emerged during the process. These were related to how to enable previously unregistered but eligible citizens or workers to actually receive the support, while needing to address social/physical distancing or lockdown measures that prevented physical presence. For instance, some countries reported issues with obtaining the single identifier for these new set of beneficiaries (some of them did not have any sort of administrative identifier such as the tax registration number or valid government identification, e.g. Jamaica) and/or issues to ensure access to bank accounts (some did not have and thus cash collection had to be facilitated, e.g. Belize, or alternative methods as a remittance agency or a single collection site were envisaged as in Jamaica). In many cases, those challenges triggered upgrades in the IT system (web registration for benefits), itself, however, not exempt from challenges linked to the digital divide or putting in place measures to enable eligible beneficiaries to cope with the emergency (self-declaration via online module, or submission of uncertified documents for further assessment, e.g. Trinidad and Tobago⁶¹). Most of these benefits were financed through Government transfers. Nonetheless, the experience of Saint Lucia deserves to be mentioned. The National Insurance Corporation (NIC) used its own reserves to fund payment to 18,853 beneficiaries of emergency relief benefits, amounting to ECD60 million (USD22.2 million). Some social security organizations also introduced legislation changes that, although related to COVID-19, set the basis for future and more inclusive social protection legal frameworks.

As a result of the above process two results may be within reach: first, an overall improvement in the management of administrative records of both formal and informal workers; and second, an enhanced push for digitalization of the public administration process. Both those gains can generate crucial benefits for future implementation of public programmes by becoming a relevant source of information needed to design social and labour policies and allow for better efficiency and effectiveness. It is also important to note that some countries have started to institutionalize the emergency response mechanisms implemented during COVID-19. Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia are conducting feasibility studies, not only to implement unemployment insurances, but to also identify sound financial and governance structures to expand social security coverage, including to the informal economy.

61 See MSDf, ‘[Social support measures for retrenched, terminated and individuals/families with reduced income](#)’, accessed 13 October 2020.

4. While some data suggest an increase in coverage in the total number of beneficiaries by social assistance measures,⁶² there are reasons to believe that actual enjoyment remains limited.⁶³ While innovative disbursing mechanisms have been developed, those alone do not necessarily guarantee full outreach.

► Government support to businesses

► Table 7

Mapping of government support measures to businesses/employers

Country	Grants or loans, loan guarantees	Salary subsidies	Utility assistance/ discounts/ waivers/ deferrals	Tax relief (Credits, waivers or deferrals) and reductions	Reduction, waiver or deferral of other fees and penalties, loan moratoria	Waiver/ deferral of social security contributions	Business coaching or technical assistance
AIA	X (AO)			X (HO)	X	X *	
ATG	X			X (C)	X		X (THAMO)
ABW	X*	X *		X (TO) *	X*	X (T)*	
BHS	X *			X (HACO) *	X *		
BRB	X (TEnO)*				X*	X *	
BLZ	X (TEnAMO)*	X		X	X (O)	X	X (TEnAMO)
BMU	X			X (TO) *	X (T)	X	
BVI	X (TAO)*		X				
CYM	X (TO)			X (T)	X	X	X
CUW	X(TEnO)	X *					X
DMA	X (TC)			X (THO) *	X		
GRD	X (TA)	X (T)		X	X		
GUY	X		X	X (CEMO)	X		X
JAM	X (TEnO)*		X	X	X (TA)		X
MSR	X (TO)	X (TO)		X	X		X (T)
KNA	X		X	X *	X		X
LCA	X (AO)			X (CO)*	X (T)		
VCT	X (AEnO)		X (T)	X (T)	X (TO)		
SXM	X	X *		X			
SUR	X (TA)			X (TAO)	X (CO)		
TTO	X (TO)			X (HO)	X		X
TCA	X (TO)			X (TC)	X		

Note: Industries intended to directly benefit from policies: Tourism/Hospitality: T; Entertainment/Culture/Arts: En; Energy: E; Agriculture/Fisheries: A; Manufacturing: M; Health: H; Construction: C; Other: O

*Employment retention conditionality applied to the benefit.

⁶² See Diether Beuermann et al., 'COVID-19, the Caribbean crisis', Caribbean Development Trends (blog), 14 May 2020, on how social assistance measures expended their coverage and also section above on poverty.

⁶³ See for instance data presented above highlighting ignorance about benefits in Grenada.

Governments across the region have been exceptionally proactive in their attempts to support businesses throughout the COVID-19 crisis. All twenty-two countries made **grants, loans or loan guarantees** available to businesses, however, less than half of these countries adopted one measure alone. In fact, the most popular policy option involved a combination of different measures being adopted at the same time. In general, these allowances have been offered directly by the governments⁶⁴ (including its individual ministries, statutory bodies and development banks) to selected businesses; the only exception was Bermuda where the grants, guarantees and loans, have been funded by the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (an Organization that is a joint venture between Government and banks).

Strikingly, over half of the countries designed these policies for access by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) only. Accessibility was further limited by strict qualification criteria across several countries with businesses qualifying in fifteen of the countries only if they were registered. Other requirements that limited eligibility included staff size (Aruba) and sales or income specifications (Barbados and Dominica). In several instances, there were also conditions attached to these government packages. The most popular condition was staff retention, a clause that was attached to packages offered by six different countries (Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, and Jamaica). Beyond this, some governments offered unique additional conditions. For instance, in The Bahamas businesses had to agree to have their credit performance on the facility shared with the Credit Bureau and other financial institutions in the future; in Barbados, applicants for funding of digital projects needed to submit proposals for the creation and production of digital content; and in the Cayman Islands, training with the Centre for Business Development was mandatory for access.⁶⁵

Additional aid to businesses was provided in the form of **salary subsidies**. Of the six countries providing this assistance, two (Grenada and Montserrat) identified the tourism industry as a specific recipient of this initiative, though Grenada was the only country where payroll support was exclusive to this sector. Additionally, in three of the six countries (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten), Governments made the retention of workers a condition of the subsidy.

Tax relief measures have been heavily relied upon thus far to provide support to businesses, and in some cases with a direct condition linked to employment retention (The Bahamas, Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Kitts and Nevis).⁶⁶ Only three countries did not use this option. Tax relief was generally provided on corporate tax or custom duties on specific items. Uniquely, Aruba implemented a moratorium on its tourist tax and play permit (for casinos, etc.) between April-June 2020. In parallel, all but three countries choose to reduce or waive other fees, payments and penalties. Typical concessions were in loan moratoriums, waiver of license fees necessary for operating and late payment allowances.

Utility assistance⁶⁷ was the least adopted measure but it was provided in five countries in the form of VAT relief (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), temporary payment amnesty (British Virgin Islands and Saint Kitts and Nevis) and discounts (Jamaica and Guyana).

Another measure not as popular was the **waiver/deferral of social security contributions**. Only six countries gave this concession. Barbados and Belize offered deferrals/delays to payment while Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands provided waivers for a specified period of time, with Bermuda offering the longest waiver (one year beginning 1 July 2020, and terminating on 30 June 2021). Of the six countries, three (Anguilla, Aruba and Barbados) attached employment retention conditionalities, while Aruba only provided these waivers to entrepreneurs and companies in tourism and related industries.

The last option to be explored is the provision of **business coaching/technical assistance**. Across the nine countries where this support was given, four included programmes conducted by a development agency or their equivalent (Antigua and Barbuda - St John's Development Corporation; Cayman Islands - Cayman Islands

⁶⁴ Though this means that governments supplied (i.e. funded) the provisions, there was still cooperation with the private sector to coordinate distribution.

⁶⁵ It is important to note that though many of the government programmes outlined the way funds should be used, these were not applied as conditions to access the loans.

⁶⁶ For instance, in The Bahamas, the Tax Credit and Tax Deferral Employment Retention Programme aimed at providing businesses (medium and large sized enterprises) with cash to preserve employment levels. In Dominica, a corporate income tax rebate was guaranteed for firms signing an agreement with Government, committing to retaining 80 per cent of staff for a period of 12 months.

⁶⁷ Note was only made where governments specified businesses as particular targets for this type relief plan even if the business might have benefited by proxy from utility assistance designed for the public at large.

Centre for Business Development; Trinidad and Tobago - National Enterprise Development Company; and Guyana - the Small Business Bureau)⁶⁸ while in Belize, both the private (Chamber of Commerce) and public sector (Belize Tourism Board) led initiatives. Governments of the four remaining countries (Saint Lucia, Montserrat, Jamaica and Guyana) have been leading coaching efforts through selected ministries. Though programmes were broad in nature, common themes included capacity building, business continuity, support to establish and market businesses through online platforms, businesses diversification, social media management and technical capacity building to remain COVID-compliant. A special mention of the Jamaica initiative by the Companies Office of Jamaica COVID-19 “Compliance Relief Initiative” which is to assist entities which have ceased or will cease operations before 31 August in being officially removed from the Companies and Business Names Registers, and avoid incurring additional fees associated with remaining open.

In total, no one country adopted all the support types, however Belize employed the most (six) while the British Virgin Islands employed the least (two). Thirteen governments attached employment retention conditionalities to at least one measure designed to support businesses with nine not attaching any (See Table 7 for details). In terms of the measures themselves, utility assistance and business coaching/technical assistance never came with an employment retention clause for any country. On the other hand, tax relief measures and government subsidies (loans, grants and guarantees) were the most likely to have this condition attached, six countries applying this condition for both measures.


68 These are all statutory government agencies.


► Other measures with direct labour market impact


► Table 8

Mapping of additional response measures with direct labour market impact

Country	Tripartite discussion of policy response(s)	Loosened monetary policy	Joint support interventions by unions and employers	Visa facilitation measures
AIA		X		X
ATG	X (TO)	X	X (T)	X
ABW	X	X		X
BHS	X (TO)	X	X (T)	X
BRB	X (TO)	X	X (O)	X
BLZ	X	X		
BMU	X (TO)		X	X
BVI	X			X
CYM				X(HO)
CUW	X		X	
DMA		X		
GRD	X (C,M,A,O)	X		
GUY	X (TO)	X		
JAM	X	X		
MSR		X		X
KNA		X		
LCA	X		X	
VCT		X	X	
SXM	X			
SUR	X	X	X	
TTO	X	X		
TCA	X (T)			

 Combination of two or more of the following policies: reduced interest/discount rates, reduced cash reserve requirements/policies to maintain reserve requirements, reduced borrowing rates/limits OR increased lending capacity

 Combination of listed policies plus other measures

 Reduced borrowing rates/limits OR increased lending capacity

Note: Industries intended to directly benefit from policies: Tourism/Hospitality: T; Agriculture/Fisheries: A; Manufacturing: M; Health: H; Construction: C; Other: O

In any crisis of this magnitude, cooperation between relevant stakeholders is key to the development and successful implementation of mitigation strategies. For the most part, governments across the region understood this. Visible **tripartite discussions** have taken place in at least sixteen countries, while joint support intervention by unions and employers could be found in eight. Notably, in both situations stakeholders from the tourism industry were heavily involved, more so than any other sector. Countries where neither action (tripartite discussions or joint support interventions) was taken include Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Montserrat, and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

Over half of the countries considered for this report adopted **accommodative monetary strategies** in response to COVID-19. Monetary policy took various forms across the region, however, most countries opted to adopt a combination of measures. Fourteen of the fifteen countries which adopted a loose monetary strategy utilized some combination of at least two of the following: reduced interests/discount rates, reduced cash reserve requirements, reduced borrowing limits and increased lending capacity.

Finally, there have been notable changes to **visa and immigration measures** in response to COVID-19. Of the nine countries that developed new measures, six of these did so to encourage tourism by facilitating remote work. To do this, the Governments of Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Barbados, The Bahamas, Bermuda, and Montserrat, developed a new permit that would allow foreigners to work remotely from within their countries (though most specify that it would not allow workers to seek employment in the country itself). In the other two countries, the objective was to support migrant workers and so changes were made there. In the British Virgin Islands, The Government created a new conditional work permit for immigrant workers whose employments were terminated, to allow them to look for work for up to three months while in the Cayman Islands. The new policy allows non-Caymanians medical professionals to be temporarily exempt from certain provisions (for example: work permit expiration). Of further significance is the fact that the Cayman Islands was the only country to extend financial support to foreigners, including providing work permit holders with a one-time food voucher worth (KYD150).

► Inside look

For the purpose of the present assessment, the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean carried out in depth interviews with key stakeholders and documental review to analyse initial country responses regarding specific dimensions of interest to the labour market. Those include OSH, changes in legal framework, employment services and labour market policies and operations by employers' and workers' organizations. The following boxes present the main findings from such analysis.

Occupational safety and health and return to work, the Caribbean experience

Overview. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on Caribbean workplaces, workers, working methods and how businesses operate. Caribbean Ministries of Labour/ Health (MOL/H) took specific actions to protect workers and guide businesses on how to promote safe working conditions in their surroundings. These measures were generally guided by principles and methods set forth in International Labour Standards (ILS) and ILO guidance on OSH risk management, such as the hierarchical order that prioritizes measures offering greater effectiveness against occupational risk, as follows:

1. Measures to eliminate risks, where possible;
2. Measures to reduce risks through engineering, organizational and administrative controls; and
3. The use of personal protective equipment (PPE).⁶⁹

Ministries in charge of labour and health took the lead and joined forces to design and implement the above.

Social dialogue with workers and employers was a key feature in the design process and acceptance of measures, albeit not in all countries. Nonetheless, the implementation of these measures has engaged all key stakeholders in the workplace, giving a prominent role to building a culture of prevention. Public awareness and sensitization were enablers to successfully address the challenges in the workplace, not only for workers and employers, but also for third parties.

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⁶⁹ 'A 10 step tool for a safe and healthy return to work in times of COVID-19', Instructional material, 21 May 2020.

A common feature observed during the pandemic was the need for a continuous review of the prevention and control measures. The latter responded to the evolving situation of the pandemic (including national attitudes and behaviours and public measures to limit the spread of the virus) and updates in scientific knowledge.

OSH departments engaged with employers in a blended approach. On the one hand, they maintained channels open for dialogue to provide advice and receive feedback from workplaces. On the other hand, the provision of enhanced training to OSH inspectors and the practice of conducting inspections allowed countries to ensure a generally high level of compliance.

In addition to physical risks linked to the pandemic, OSH interventions have also started addressing psychosocial factors. This has proven effective to reduce any potential anxiety that workers may suffer and is of particular importance for those workers who were not deemed as essential and could not perform work from their homes.

Finally, within the framework of OSH, some of the Caribbean countries also started addressing the challenges that workers faced that were linked to remote work, such as ergonomics and work-life balance.

Country responses. The paragraphs below provide a summary of the main interventions, procedure and processes in selected Caribbean countries:

The Bahamas. The measures deployed by the Ministry of Labour (MOL) in The Bahamas included the conducting of inspections to ensure that COVID-19 protocols were being adhered to and supervising the mandatory implementation of hand sanitizers, touchless temperature gauges/ sanitizer dispensers and frequent hand washing. It has been observed that the measures introduced were implemented successfully and most persons complied with the regulations with the exception of some issues on construction sites. However, there were some challenges in the implementation of measures because some persons experienced discomfort in wearing masks (some persons reporting difficult to breathe) and hosted private gatherings. With regards to OSH measures and protocols for non-essential workers who are beginning to return to the workplace, The Bahamas Environment Group circulated a booklet outlining the necessary safety measures that should be taken, following the same process for essential workers.

Barbados. Barbados enacted measures that were based on the Emergency Act in collaboration with the Barbados Employers' Confederation and other stakeholders. The objective of the measures was to limit the transmission of the virus through protocols related to the lockdown period and the subsequent reopening of the country. These measures included the development of disinfecting procedures and hygiene guidelines, the strict enforcement of mask wearing, a curfew, stay at home orders for non-essential workers and the conducting of business by surname. Discussions at the tripartite level were held to establish how the economy could be reopened when there was a reduction in COVID-19 cases. Two main innovations were the creation of a new COVID-19 monitoring unit comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and the development of health and safety protocols for the tourism industry. The Ministry of Labour reported that the measures had an enforcement rate between 90-94 per cent, with periodic inspections performed on essential businesses during the curfew period. These inspections revealed that there was general compliance with the measures and resulted in no reports of COVID-19 transmission, especially in the manufacturing sector. The Ministry of Labour developed protocols and guidelines for the return to work in various sectors and establishments as it commenced reopening. Concerning workers that will be performing their jobs remotely, the Ministry of Labour is developing guidelines for employees' management of work-life balance and ergonomics at home. Joint Safety and Health Committees played an important role in the adaptation and implementation of protocols and measures and there has always been a concerted effort to promote a team based approach to resolving issues in the workplace. The Ministry of Labour conducted virtual training sessions with these committees as well as with other workplaces to stimulate its implementation where they did not exist.

Grenada. The Grenada Ministries of Labour and Health distributed flyers to educate workers on the necessary protocols to follow to ensure their safety at work. These protocols involved the practicing of social distancing, the wearing of masks, sanitizing and staying at home if workers presented COVID-19-related symptoms. Other measures included designated transportation for essential workers, regular public briefings, the completion of forms when visiting workplaces, online forms for Government services, a tripartite approach to handling COVID-19 issues, as well as the following of guidelines provided by external health authorities and the ILO. Prevention and control measures were implemented successfully and contributed to control the virus in private workplaces and within its Government Ministries (none of the Ministries' employees or healthcare workers contracted the virus). In terms of the measures that outlined protocols for non-essential workers returning to work, the MOL deployed the same guidelines that were created for essential workers. The MOL/H also embarked on a course of action that including the inspection of workplaces for safety and health issues related to COVID-19.

Jamaica. Hygiene and physical distancing guidelines were created and circulated as well as industry specific protocols⁷⁰ found within the Disaster Risk Management Act and Orders, an Act enacted as a result of the pandemic. In order to ensure compliance with the measures there was the creation of a partnership between the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) and the Ministry of Health to ensure that delinquent workplaces were identified and that appropriate actions were undertaken. ⁷¹The MLSS launched campaigns with the aim of promoting safe working conditions. These campaigns provided guidance on flexible working arrangements, the safe use of air conditioning systems, the importance of ergonomics at home and guidance on how to cope with workplace induced anxiety and stress.

In response to a potential increase in workers' mental deterioration, the MLSS expanded its Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Helpline.

Other measures enacted included the maintenance of regular contact with safety managers/officers, inspections of facilities to ensure their adherence to required protocols and the conducting of virtual presentations to educate businesses and professional associations on how to operate safely during the pandemic. Enhanced training was provided to inspectors to ensure that they were able to identify businesses that are not compliant with COVID-19 measures during routine inspections. The department also encouraged employers to be cognizant of employee leave policies as required by law. The MOL's inspections in industrial establishments have shown that most entities complied with the measures introduced with few exceptions⁷² breaching the Disaster Risk Management Orders or the Infection and Prevention Protocols.

Saint Lucia. COVID-19 protocols and guidelines were prepared by the Ministry of Health (MOH) for each sector, however, the responsibility for ensuring compliance remained with the OSH Unit of the Labour Department via their inspection process. Furthermore, the COVID-19 protocols were a mandatory condition for the commencement of construction work. In some cases, permission to resume activity was granted only upon implementation of prevention and control measures. Traditional and social media campaigns created sensitization and awareness and supported the successful implementation of measures. Despite the success, upon reopening, some businesses faced the challenge of implementing some of these measures due to the high cost associated with compliance. Some smaller businesses in

⁷⁰ In particular, given the recognition of the heightened risk of transmission for tourism workers, health and safety protocols were developed in collaboration with other Ministries and international tourism bodies.

⁷¹ The MOL/H established a protocol between the MOL and the MOH to trigger an alarm when serious breaches of the requirements dictated by the Disaster Risk Management Act or Infection and Prevention Risk Protocols during workplace inspections.

⁷² In particular, the country did face a challenge in promoting safe working conditions as it experienced a major outbreak of COVID-19 (more than 200 positive cases) in an organization within the Business Processing Outsourcing (BPO) sector which forced stakeholders to evaluate OSH measures. This revaluation was done in the form of a task force created to review operations and make recommendations on how to combat the transmission of the virus in an industry that employs approximately 40,000. The output from this collaboration included a process report template, Environmental Health Guidelines for the BPO sector as a whole, and a public health checklist for BPO offices. These new measures were adopted by mid-May and resulted in the implementation of enhanced OSH protocols that outlined the process for maintaining personal and workplace hygiene. These measures were then used as a guide and were expanded to other industries.

particular, were unable to adhere to some of the standards due to financial constraints and a lack of technical capacities. In addition, compliance was partially compromised due to the limited capacity of the MOL to enforce over the whole territory.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines did not issue a stay at home order so business continued to operate (with the exception of hotels) and reopening protocols for returning workers were not necessary. Nevertheless, OSH measures were adopted in response to COVID-19 in the area of sanitization, ventilation and hygiene. The MOH released advisories regarding hand washing and safety both at work and at home. Other actions undertaken included the sanitization of buses after a certain number of trips and structural changes to barriers between customers and workers to protect both parties. These measures to promote workplace safety were successfully implemented in the workplace and persons were receptive to them and adhered to the advisories. Measures and guidelines were developed specifically for persons returning to work in the hospitality and tourism industries which were closed due to the pandemic. The MOL engaged in special partnerships with other stakeholders to address labour relations issues. While there were no Joint Safety and Health Committees formed to deal with COVID-19 in the public sector, OSH committees in the private sector were activated to address health and safety issues.

Trinidad and Tobago. In Trinidad and Tobago, the MOH has been the main source of guidance on COVID-19 matters. The Occupational Safety and Health Authority (OSHA) has elaborated Guidelines for working from home and for return to work, has participated in committees related to COVID-19 and has directed persons to guidelines created by the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding working from home and in the office. OSHA has also collaborated with employee groups via webinars to educate persons on preventative measures related to specific industries, hand washing, social distancing, staggered scheduling of staff and the wearing of masks. Additionally, a hotline to provide assistance has been established. Employers and workers are generally adhering to the measures and companies have been practicing corporate responsibility. Reaching smaller businesses and the lack of vigilance on the part of some employers has been a challenge. Bipartite discussions with union have been held to effectively address the challenges on workplaces imposed as a result of COVID-19 and the measures adopted by the Government.

Legal responses to labour market challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the Caribbean workplace and its workers. Several governments responded by providing special legal protections to workers and employers or more flexibilities than the normal legal requirements with a view to allow employers and workers to meet the new challenges. In some other cases, measures were provided in guidance documents rather than legislation. The following contains the information on these measures. It was collected amongst others- through interviews of legal officers of the ministries or departments of labour of the following countries and territory: Barbados, Belize, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. Additional information, including the one on other countries, was taken from the ILO's Country policy response database for COVID-19.⁷³

Selected legislative and other responses to COVID-19

Subject	Measures adopted	How the measures were adopted
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► The Cabinet is empowered in the time of emergency or calamity, to grant, on a case by case basis, extensions or exemptions in relation to any prescribed period of compliance set out in the Law (Cayman Islands). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Cayman Islands: Labour (Amendment) Law, 2020.⁷⁴
Flexible modalities of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Working from home or working on a rotational basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: Practical arrangement (The Governments allowed flexible working such as teleworking. It was later replicated in the private sector). ► The Bahamas, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis: Emergency Powers Acts or Statutory Rules and Orders encourage, and in some case (early lockdowns) mandate non-exempted businesses to continue to operate with employees working from home. Public service employees were also mandated to work from home unless designated as essential workers. ► Curaçao, Jamaica, Montserrat, Suriname, Sint Maarten, Turks and Caicos: The population and businesses were “encouraged” to make use of flexible work arrangements. In Jamaica those were provided for under the Employment (Flexible Work Arrangements) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2014 (Act No. 15 of 2014).⁷⁵ In Montserrat a new flexible working arrangements policy for public officers was issued.
Layoff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Lay off period was extended. The intent behind taking this measure appeared to be to allow employers to retain employment of workers as long as possible (Barbados, Cayman Islands, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Barbados: Severance Payments (Amendment) Act, 2020.⁷⁶ ► Cayman Islands: Labour (Extension of Severance Pay Period) Regulations, 2020.⁷⁷ ► Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: COVID-19 Miscellaneous Amendment Act (2020).⁷⁸

74 <http://dlp.gov.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12950485.PDF>

75 [https://japarliament.gov.jm/attachments/341_339_Employment%20\(%20Flexible%20Work%20Arrangements\)%20\(Miscellaneous%20Provisions\)%20bill.%202014.%20No.15.pdf](https://japarliament.gov.jm/attachments/341_339_Employment%20(%20Flexible%20Work%20Arrangements)%20(Miscellaneous%20Provisions)%20bill.%202014.%20No.15.pdf)

76 <https://www.bahamasparliament.com/uploads/sittings/attachments/6a9af32b63c9c0c6ef9d4617974cacc1.pdf>

77 <http://gazettes.gov.ky/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/12946549.PDF>

78 <https://searchlight.vc/searchlight/news/2020/04/13/parliament-amends-two-employment-related-laws-to-address-covid-19-fallout/>

Hours of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► An employer may reduce gross weekly wages and maximum weekly working hours with the agreement of the employee concerned (Belize). ► Labour Minister may exempt establishments or categories of workers from the legal requirement on hours of night rest. (Belize). ► “Encouragement” to explore reduction in working hours as a measure to avoid layoffs and protect workers (Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Jamaica, Suriname). ► New public sector policies introducing flexible working arrangements in terms of working hours, including staggered/split work days, flexi-time, compressed working week, and longer working hours (Montserrat). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Belize: Labour (Amendment) Act, 2020.⁷⁹ ► In Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Jamaica, Suriname: Various declarations or recommendations published on the ministries of labour’s websites dealt with the matter. Note that in Aruba, the willingness of business to be flexible with the working hours of their employees partially before abruptly reducing working hours completely, was a condition to receive relief packages.⁸⁰
Leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► An employer may place an employee on leave without pay if the economic conditions of the employer have been affected, with the agreement of the employee (Belize). ► During the lockdown, paying prorated holiday pay for the number of days they would have earned paid leave while allowing them the right to have their vacation at a later day (Saint Kitts and Nevis). ► [Proposal] Introduction of a special type of leave called “pandemic leave” (Trinidad and Tobago). ► Advisory on utilization of paid leave during lockdowns issued by Ministries of Labour (Aruba, Cayman Islands, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Turks and Caicos).⁸¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Belize: Labour (Amendment) Act, 2020. ► Saint Kitts and Nevis: Agreement between employers and workers.⁸² ► Trinidad and Tobago: National Workplace Guidelines (draft). ► Aruba: The Department of Labour clarified that employers can ask workers to use unused vacation days but workers must be paid in full for such days. ► Cayman Islands: The Government reminded that employer are not required to pay employees for hours not worked and can initiate unpaid leave. Vacation leave and sick leave can be used during the shelter-in-place period subject to mutual agreement of employer and employee. ► Jamaica: The Ministry of Labour and Social Security encouraged employers to provide sick leave and time for quarantine with pay as far as possible, even above law. ► Grenada: The Government encouraged the trade union movement to work with the business community to support the use of vacation leave as a first option in the event that the businesses have to resort to skeleton staff.

79 <https://www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Act-No-25-of-2020-Labour.pdf>

80 See <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/regional-country/country-responses/lang--en/index.htm>

81 See <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/regional-country/country-responses/lang--en/index.htm>

82 Information provided at an interview with the Labour Department.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Saint Lucia: The Government issued an advisory mentioning that “as there is no requirement by law to pay wages during the partial or complete shutdown, employers may consult with their employees towards utilizing these days as paid vacation days and if both parties agree, then the agreement should be committed to writing”. ► Suriname: The Government reminded that employers cannot oblige their workers to take leave. ► Turks and Caicos: Reminder was given to employers that employees cannot be forced to take leave. ► Montserrat: The Government introduced a ‘Discretionary Leave Provision’ which allows additional paid leave for public service workers between 16 Mar and 3 April, to allow employees the time and flexibility to make alternative arrangements for the supervision of school-aged children. Given upon approval of Heads of Departments. ► Saint Vincent and the Grenadines: established an altered regime for the granting of sick leave for central Government employees with flu-like symptoms or respiratory problems or COVID-19 infections.
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Information sharing. In Barbados and Saint Vincent and Grenadines, effort was made to explain the provisions of the existing labour legislation in the context of COVID-19. Guidance documents were produced for this purpose.⁸³

Linkages with pre pandemic legislation. While the pandemic caught most countries off guard, in terms of labour legislation responses, Jamaica was prepared and existing legislation contain necessary provisions. The Disaster Risk Management Act provides for working conditions during disasters. Orders in accordance with the Act had been issued, which included guidance on relevant matters such as the encouragement of teleworking or the use of staggered shifts.

Reaction of the social partners and stakeholders. The social partners and other stakeholders reacted differently to these measures. They implemented the adopted measures in some cases. In other cases, they expressed their opposition.⁸⁴ In both cases, efforts were made and mechanisms were put in place to bring the social partners and other stakeholders together and to promote their understanding and collaboration. Overall, based on information gathered from key stakeholders interviews in selected Caribbean countries (Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago) the following were observed:

1. Almost universal resort to social dialogue to discuss legislative changes: Governments, employers and workers gathered and consulted the measures even under the pressure of time.
2. Widespread information sharing via websites and official press releases. Notable in this regard is that continuous updates of the information won the confidence of the social partners (e.g. Barbados).

⁸³ Barbados: <https://labour.gov.bb/covid-19-guidance-for-business-places/>

⁸⁴ For instance, see a case in Belize as reported by the media (<http://7newsbelize.com/sstory.php?nid=54424>).

3. Follow-up mechanisms: Consultations prior to the adoption of measures may or may not have led to agreements or support of all stakeholders. The latter case can be more likely than the normal situation as time is more limited under emergency arising from COVID-19. Even in this situation, there was a case where a body was created to monitor the implementation of the adopted measure and consider possible adjustment (e.g. an oversight committee in Belize for the amended Labour Act).

Labour market policies and the role of employment services

As highlighted and described in the above paragraphs, countries across the Caribbean have put in place during the first months of the pandemic various interventions aimed at supporting citizens, workers (those with reduced income, recently dismissed or furloughed), job seekers (pre- and post-COVID-19) and economic units. This section investigates what role public employment services in selected Caribbean countries played in the implementation of some of the above measures and, specifically, how the COVID-19 induced changes affected their operating procedures, budgets, working tools and partnerships. Interviews with responsible staff for the public employment services (or equivalent) in The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago allowed for the determining of some common and country specific elements introduced below.

COVID-19 response measures. While a range of new instruments became available to the public in response to the economic downturn generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, employment services had, generally speaking, a marginal role in their implementation. On the one hand, measures entailing financial disbursements were (and still are) generally managed through other entities (most notably social security institutions)⁸⁵ and this applies also in countries with a pre-existing unemployment insurance system (such as The Bahamas and Barbados).⁸⁶ On the other, the main task that employment services were called upon to provide was to continue their provision of job search assistance, job brokering and placement services with little engagement in other forms of support and little change in the targeting strategy.

Against this backdrop, the main innovations with respect to the “business as usual” scenario were:

- Introduction of enhanced outreach via social media campaigns and various IT innovations (see below on “challenges”).
- Refinement in the target groups⁸⁷ including workers previously in the tourism industry, household workers, mortgagors or workers involuntarily employed part time.
- Introduction of new forms of assistance related to other (Government issued) COVID-19 support measures. For instance, in The Bahamas, employment services became engaged in assisting those seeking government issued grants with their application.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Suriname was a partial exception as the Ministry of Labour/employment services was an integral part, together with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, of the process for the disbursement of the COVID-19 emergency funds destined to individuals who have lost their jobs. Specifically, with helping with the registration of the above groups, screening and selecting the people who actually need the benefit and with the drawing up the payout lists.

⁸⁶ In Barbados, the requirement to visit the employment services to receive unemployment benefits (including the new COVID-19 related ones) was actually discontinued for the COVID-19 related support.

⁸⁷ In Jamaica, a specific new target group was identified in the “vulnerable groups” including, for example, those previously employed in the tourism industry, in need to transfer their skills to more resilient sectors during the pandemic. In addition, specific support to household workers via their union to access the online employment portal and to mortgagors unable to meet their payments to access internships, was provided. In Suriname, support operations were geared to persons with reduced working hours or other working restrictions (e.g. transportation) because of the pandemic. In Trinidad and Tobago, the unit reached out to persons who were retrenched or unemployed due to COVID-19 to refer them to courses provided by Coursera (an online education platform).

⁸⁸ In Belize, unemployment relief was extended to those unemployed prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the beneficiaries were also referred to the Ministry of Human Development for consideration for further assistance through social programmes.

- Provision or referral to new training courses. While some of the employment services provided training courses are being revised,⁸⁹ employment services became one of the referral agencies to newly established post COVID-19 reskilling training courses (e.g. Barbados, with the Workforce Recovery Programme and the National Transformation/Training Unit courses, Jamaica with the Workforce Training Program, Trinidad and Tobago with the Coursera courses).

On a more general note, it is to be also noted that while employment services may not have changed substantially their operations to implement COVID-19 response measures, the reference Ministries (Ministries of Labour or equivalent) were - without exception - involved in inter-ministerial committees in charge of their design.

Main challenges and responses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, employment services of the region had to respond to a triple challenge: (i) an increased amount of (potential) clients (job seekers); (ii) physical distancing measures eliminating or limiting physical interaction with them; and (iii) need to combine traditional assistance with new forms of support provided by other public agents.⁹⁰ Answers revolved around three main strategies:

1. Enhancement of technological tools (software). These included: bettered online portals/databases (The Bahamas and Suriname),⁹¹ website (Dominica), apps (Jamaica), social media presence (Dominica and Jamaica), and online forms (Dominica). To be noted, however, that despite some progress, not all the interviewed employment services benefitted from upgrade or extension of hardware to the desired extent and more substantial investment appears to be needed.
2. Changes in operating procedures. Most countries reported shifting their internal processes to allow them to continue their operations during the pandemic.
 - Remote interviews via web conferencing tools or mobile phone based messaging and calling apps or even traditional phones with dedicated lines (The Bahamas, Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago) became the norm.⁹² In addition, group sessions are to be moved on line (Jamaica is planning to do so for the job readiness sessions).
 - For those countries who physically reopened their facilities, what was common was the reduction in the number of persons in the office at a time and the modality to usher job seekers into the office.
3. Extended search for partnerships. Employment services became actively involved and sought out for new partnerships to be able to better targeted people in need (e.g. in Jamaica with the Household Workers' Union), support strained businesses (employer organizations (The Bahamas and Suriname) or, proactively looking for sectors with a high labour demand during the pandemic.⁹³

A note on budget. Most countries reported that they did not receive additional funding for their operations following the worsening of the economic conditions due to the pandemic with the exception of Suriname where ES were an integral part of the operation for the disbursement of relief funds and Barbados, which actually reported a reduction in available funds.⁹⁴ As such, any change in the *modus operandi* was based on reorganization of the current budget. One particular implication of the

⁸⁹ For example, in Jamaica the employment services job readiness curriculum is being revised to account for the changed situation due to the pandemic. See also the case of Barbados with the introduction of new courses for jobseekers (albeit not under the aegis of the employment services directly, but of a newly established Government Unit).

⁹⁰ In the Caribbean there are several examples of new actors activated to provide support to job seekers, for example, the Bahamas Society for Human Resource Management introduced new tutorials and lectures on YouTube outlining the qualities that Human Resources looks for in potential employees, were introduced as part of the services to job seekers.

⁹¹ Barbados plans to develop an online job seeker assessment tool.

⁹² In one case, special physical drop boxes to accept documentation from job seekers were installed (Trinidad and Tobago).

⁹³ The case of Trinidad and Tobago is worth mentioning where the PES actually assisted the public sector itself to recruit staff necessary to implement new pandemic responding measures. In addition, Dominica reported businesses reaching out to receive help to fill specific vacancies.

⁹⁴ To be noted, however, that a new Unit responsible for the National Transformation/Training Initiative known as the ILO supported "Employability Project" was created to assist job seekers with developmental objectives linked to their core skills, dealing with change job readiness, career planning systems and cycles, OSH and entrepreneurship.

unchanged level of resources was the reported limitation that this entailed to remote work within the employment services themselves. Lack of devices hindered not only basic communication between staff and with customers, but also the very same training of the staff itself to cope with the contingency. Also reported in one case was the lack of adequate PPE throughout which de facto forced the maintenance of remote services rather than switching to in person ones.

Employer and Business Membership Organizations' responses

Employer and Business Membership Organizations (EBMOs) represent a key asset in any society: its enterprises. The EBMOs in the region have had to implement creative and innovative strategies by influencing the policy environment and providing services that improve enterprise performance. The following information provides an assessment of the actions of seven EBMOs in the Caribbean and the lessons learned from being at the frontline to help to shape policy choices and promote business continuity measures.⁹⁵

Lobbying and advocacy measures. EBMOs have engaged in social tripartite dialogue with governments and workers' organizations in order to influence policy outcomes.

- The Barbados Employers' Federation was involved in discussions regarding the national curfew and shutdown measures and pursued joint action with the Labour Department on delivery and curbside protocols as it relates to essential goods.
- The Employers Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago provided comments towards the draft National Policy Guidelines on Preparing Workplaces in Trinidad and Tobago for COVID-19. Both the Barbados Employers' Federation and the Employers Consultative Association also lobbied, on the grounds of surveys conducted within their membership (See Text box 1) for economic measures such as government grants, tax relief measures to worst-hit sectors, and low-interest loans as critical to enable enterprises, their workers and families to cope with challenges resulting from COVID-19.
- The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation has also been engaged in social dialogue discussions within the National Tripartite Council and the National Coordination Committee on COVID-19 ("NCCC"), to amend the Employment Act to recognize force majeure. Additionally, the Chamber submitted further recommendations to the Government related to providing financial relief to its members such as guidance on tax concessions and grant funding. It also provided input on the Government's Business Continuity Loan and Grants Program for SMEs.
- Dominica Employers' Federation presented proposals addressing income substitutions for affected workers and engaged Dominica Social Security to discuss minimizing the impact of the pandemic on workers' wages.
- For Saint Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry, representation and participation in social dialogue was through two task forces, the Disaster Mitigation Task Force and the COVID-19 Task Force. Through its participation in the COVID-19 Task Force, the Chamber provided inputs regarding the reopening of essential services.
- The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry contributed towards social dialogue by clarifying labour and employment related questions from members. In this regards the Chamber submitted policy proposals including a guide on business continuity planning, a post-pandemic economic recovery plan and an FAQ for labour questions developed in consultation with the Economic Development Council and the Labour Department.

⁹⁵ The EBMOs considered are: the Barbados Employers' Confederation (BEC), The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation (BCEEC), Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Dominica Employers' Federation (DEF), Jamaica Employers' Federation (JEF), Saint Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SKNCCI), and the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ECATT). Some of the actions implemented by the EBMOs are based on tools and guidelines developed by the ILO Bureau of Employers' Activities to support EBMOs in promoting safe workplaces and influencing policy outcomes. Those included proposing evidence-based policy recommendations to enable economic and social recovery, engaging in tripartite and bipartite dialogue on policy issues and supported government action to protect public health and formulate business response measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of the crisis.

- The Jamaica Employers' Federation has had a favourable dialogue with workers organizations on the need to balance workers' and employers' needs. The Federation participated in tripartite discussions regarding amendments to lay-off provisions as stipulated in the employment legislation.

Tripartite discussions. While there has been engagements and discussions at the tripartite level, some EBMOs have noted the ineffectiveness of some of these social dialogue mechanisms. For instance, the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago noted that the National Tripartite Advisory Committee (NTAC) was somewhat ineffective, underutilized and lacked the resources to implement impactful solutions. The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated that participation in social dialogue had been challenging and ineffective. Specifically, amendments to legislation were made without consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.

Services provided to member enterprises. Many employers' organizations developed several dedicated tools and guides to support their member enterprise recovery process.

- The Barbados Employers' Federation published a tool kit addressing several issues as it relates to maintaining operations during the pandemic. These include managing COVID-19 in the workplace, business continuity options and initiating layoffs. The Organization also hosted a five part webinar series to empower members to survive and thrive in the time of COVID-19. Episodes addressed operating a business within the context of COVID-19, health and safety practices for essential services and making decisions regarding layoffs.
- The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation embarked on a communication and awareness campaign, which saw the Chamber providing more than 500 pieces of communication to its members on a wide array of topics such as safe working environments, remote and virtual operations as well as Government programmes. The Chamber also partnered with the National Insurance Board to facilitate clear communication regarding access to employment benefits and made specific recommendations on ways to expand the operations of sectors during the Emergency Power Orders.
- The Dominica Employers' Federation published a World of Work document to provide COVID-19 related information and developed an Enterprise Pandemic Plan Template consisting of four phases and the key actions needed to be taken during each stage. It also partnered with a local fabric and stitching enterprise to design a cloth N95 mask and released a COVID-19 midweek update which aimed to provide guidance and solutions to employers on areas including absenteeism, vacations, reduced working hours and layoffs.
- The Saint Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry shared the guidelines created by the ILO and worked closely with organizations to ensure that they were up-to-date on the requirements necessary to operate during the pandemic.
- The Jamaica Employers' Federation shared guidelines developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the local MOH to educate its members on how to continue their business operations within the "new normal". The Organization also strived to ensure that its membership was kept abreast of the layoff provision in the Jamaican Law to ensure their compliance.
- The Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago shared bulletins as well as conducted training on how employers should operate in the workplace during COVID-19. The training conducted covered OSH considerations, business and continuity planning, leave policies and travel policies. It participated in several media interviews discussing COVID-19 as well as provided updates to its members about COVID-19 on a national, regional and international level.
- The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry hosted an information session on COVID-19 conducted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). The Chamber updated its website to provide information on COVID-19 from a wide array of sources including the ILO and the Government and utilized social media and Zoom meetings to reach its members. Other communication initiatives included a radio/TV show, a weekly newspaper column, e-newsletters, press releases and the posting of the summary of the state of emergency. The Chamber is also part a joint bilateral programme with workers developing and implementing communication and awareness campaign to educate the public about COVID-19 measures.

General assessment. The employers' organizations have noted the positive impact of their tools and guidance on members and acknowledged that some of these measures facilitated creativity and supported business resilience. The Barbados Employers' Federation and the Saint Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry experienced an increase in membership because of valuable information provided to members. Additionally, The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation was lauded by the Government for the tools it provided to members and for its role in establishing safe back-to-work practices. The tools and the support provided to employers in Trinidad and Tobago were also accessed and utilized by workers' organizations and the suggestion by the Employers' Consultative Association for employers to pay workers during quarantine under certain conditions, was welcomed with no objections.

At the same time, there is mix reactions regarding effectiveness of government interventions. The Barbados Employers' Confederation found that Government's interventions were successful due in part to collaboration with the private sector in developing these interventions. In particular, interventions related to guidelines on layoffs, short time and severance were the most useful. The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation highlighted the additional benefits persons received from the Government as the most helpful action. The Dominica Employers' Federation noted a gap in the Government effort to disseminate guidelines and information related to COVID-19 and the lack of response to employees laid off or made redundant. The guidelines for reopening of businesses and the outcome of the COVID-19 Task Force were the most effective interventions by the Government according to Saint Kitts and Nevis Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Government guidelines relating to infection, prevention and control provided by the Ministry of Health was very helpful according to Jamaica Employers' Federation and provided businesses with much needed information to reopen and operate safely. According to the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government interventions were unsuccessful. In particular, the Government did not provide assistance to employers via payroll support, direct grants, tax reductions or extensions of statutory payments, and in cases where it did offer assistance, some members were not able to access the support due to strict application criteria.

Worker organizations' responses

This section seeks to assess the extent of the impact of the pandemic on workers and specifically union members and the responses by workers' organizations. The assessment is partly based on interviews with representatives from selected workers organizations in The Bahamas⁹⁶, Barbados⁹⁷, Belize⁹⁸, Jamaica⁹⁹, Saint Lucia¹⁰⁰, Saint Kitts and Nevis¹⁰¹ and Trinidad and Tobago¹⁰². Due to resource constraints, it was not possible to engage with all federations/unions within those countries (and the rest of the Caribbean).

Most unions reported that unemployment was the main issue that their members faced, alongside with lack of access to social security for those employed in the informal sector, reduced working hours and layoffs. The private sector, and within the tourism industry and the informal sector, were named as the most impacted by COVID-19.

96 National Congress of Trade Unions (NCTU) representing workers from all industries in both the public and private sectors with the majority of members employed in the civil service or utilities sector.

97 Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) representing all industries within the public and private sectors.

98 National Trade Union Congress of Belize (NTUCB) representing workers from a plethora of industries including the healthcare, renewable energy, agriculture and banking sectors.

99 Jamaica Household Workers' Union (JHWU) representing domestic workers.

100 Saint Lucia Trade Union Federation (TUF) representing all industries within the public and private sectors, with public sector workers forming the majority of the unions' membership.

101 Saint Kitts and Nevis Trades and Labour Union (TLU) representing workers at plants such as the Carib Brewery and Unicomer.

102 National Trade Union Centre (NATUC) representing a plethora of sectors including manufacturing, healthcare and transportation industries.

With the onset of the pandemic, trade unions have created various measures to support their members. Efforts included lobbying on behalf of their members, participation in tripartite social dialogue, as well as more direct interventions such as the provision of financial assistance and access to technology. Trade unions generally rated their measures as successful although some have experienced challenges in trying to support their members. Challenges reported included resistance from employers regarding some of the trade union's initiatives and the passing of labour legislation without consultations. The following section presents details about interventions in selected countries in three broad areas: advocacy, participation in bipartite and tripartite negotiations and unions' own initiatives.

Advocacy. In the Bahamas, the National Congress of Trade Unions (NCTU) lobbied the Government for the National Insurance Board to maximize coverage for the pandemic relief measures and lobbied on behalf of non-unionized workers in the informal sector to create a registration system that will allow them to be protected in the event of a similar situation in the future.

In Saint Lucia, the Trade Union Federation (TUF), despite not being directly involved in consultations, lobbied the Government on behalf of its members in the public service regarding salary as well as job security concerns. It resulted in an obligation laid on the employers to rehire workers when they returned to full operations.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the National Trade Union Centre (NATUC) liaised with private sector employers and wrote to departmental heads throughout the Government on behalf of its members.

In Jamaica, the Jamaica Household Workers' Union (JHWU) contacted the Minister of Finance to provide care packages for domestic workers, who were otherwise exempt from support measures provided by the Government. The Union also addressed the Government, asking to educate employers and workers about the National Insurance Scheme.

Participation in bi and tripartite negotiations. In the Bahamas, NCTU engaged in tripartite social dialogue by participating in the work of two commissions, the COVID-19 Response Team and the Economic Recovery Consul. The social dialogue led to the amendment to the Employment Benefit Policy. The NCTU participated in quarterly meetings as well as formed sub-committees in partnership with the National Insurance Board to discuss worker protection issues, it liaised with the Government to ensure the National Health Insurance initiative created by the Government was brought up to a satisfactory standard. The union also tried to engage employers directly outside of the tripartite arrangement to allow for additional discussions.

In Belize, the National Trade Union Congress of Belize (NTUCB) participated in the Oversight Committee that administered the management and distribution of PPE to frontline workers, the Government's subsidies and provision of food baskets as well as discussions on the issue of transportation. Moreover, the union was a member of a Task Force, which sought the implementation of pandemic related policies and procedures.

In Saint Lucia, the TUF noted a limited involvement in the creation of COVID-19 measures, stating that it was invited to presentations but not consultations with the exception of a consultation regarding a piece of labour legislation.

In Trinidad and Tobago, NATUC participated in bipartite negotiations with Employers' Organizations. These discussions centred on how to operate within the pandemic to ensure favourable outcomes for workers, including right to flexible working arrangements, including first of all teleworking, as well as strict adherence to social distancing protocols where no teleworking was possible.

In Jamaica, the JHWU engaged in social dialogue via letters, telephone correspondence and Zoom meetings.

In Barbados, the Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) participation in tripartite consultations led to modification of the forced savings initiative proposed by the Government to make it more palatable to their members.¹⁰³ The Union also participated in negotiations to allow for a rotation of layoffs and provided input on the Government's plan to create employment by encouraging the renovation of hotels during the pandemic, thus boosting employment in the construction industry. Finally, it also played an important role in the Severance Payments Act, stating that it negotiated a sunset clause that deferred the trigger point to claim severance by two months. Due to the current slump in the tourism industry, despite the industry's reopening, the plan will now guarantee a wage while persons are receiving training to enhance their skills instead of triggering severance.

In Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Kitts-Nevis Trades and Labour Union (TLU) reported that they participated in a tripartite discussion with the Minister of Labour to address issues pertaining to the economy, like the challenges facing the severance fund and the establishment of a stimulus package for persons in the tourism sector.

Own initiatives. NCTU in The Bahamas and NTUCB in Belize engaged in educational campaigns to encourage the use of facemasks and the practice of proper hygiene and social distancing.

In Jamaica, the JHWU launched a media campaign (radio and print media) targeted at educating its members. The Union also launched an online fundraising initiative to assist domestic workers. Additionally, it conducted a survey in partnership with the University of the West Indies to assess COVID-19 and its impact.

In Barbados, the BWU held town hall meetings to guide persons through the process of receiving severance payments and informing persons about unemployment benefits.

In Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Kitts-Nevis TLU reported that their members found their representation and welcoming of displaced workers most helpful.

¹⁰³ The revised plan allows members to purchase bonds over an eighteen month period and receive returns in four years with interest that allowed the Government access to necessary funds.



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► Part 3: Conclusions and recommendations

► What does the data say?

Accompanying a significantly reduced output production and a deterioration in the trade flows and fiscal space, the labour market impact of the crisis has been massive. At the same time, the impact on different segments of the working population is hard to determine. Depending on the country and industry of pre-COVID employment, a shift from employment to, respectively, employment with less hours of work, unemployment or out of the labour force status, has occurred. Data for Q1 and Q2 2020 suggest that both unemployment and inactivity rates have increased. While no major or unidirectional differences by gender seem to emerge, youth have most likely been impacted disproportionately relative to the rest of the working population.

In any case, evidence suggests a polarization of the impact: some workers bore the biggest burden while others maintained employment or, at least, a reasonable degree of labour market attachment. Self-employment seems to have not played the traditional buffering role, while there is not enough evidence to conclude whether informal employment did so in the Caribbean (while, for reference, in Latin America this does not appear to be the case). As expected, at risk industries such as retail trade, manufacturing and accommodation and food were among those most impacted.

The estimated improvement in the labour market during Q3 2020 seems to be directly contingent on reopening of borders and relaxation of mobility restrictions. The speed of the recovery is, however, hard to gauge with the data available. If the experience of past shocks is to be repeated, those who may benefit first are longer tenured workers who lost employment.

► What did the policy responses do?

Immediate relief. Government policy responses have been designed mostly as emergency or temporary relief but were, at the same time, many, usually quick and structured. While mostly limited in magnitude, income support measures and assistance to economic units have been widespread and have allowed citizens, workers and business, albeit not all, to keep afloat. In thirteen of the twenty-two countries examined, governments attached employment retention conditionalities for at least one measure to support businesses.

Official registration was a common feature to access business targeted support across the region with fifteen countries making this explicitly requirement. Despite this, persons in the informal economy were still able to benefit from relief targeting the general population or relief where special concessions were made for workers in the informal economy. This exception was generally attached to the provision of cash transfers where countries such as Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, The Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago, allowed persons in the informal sector access to temporary government stipends. The use of information technology and social media has been a major factor to overcome Government restrictions and physical distancing. Support programmes relied on web portals to capture claims and information and communicate with beneficiaries. Equally important was the use of bank accounts to disburse payments.

Education and training. Measures aimed at maintaining or enhancing human capital have been designed and structured and accompanied by a shift to online training, itself not exempt from challenges. The

actual incidence and number of beneficiaries varies from country to country, with some countries appearing more active (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Saint Lucia, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago). In almost no case were skills enhancing measures combined simultaneously with income or enterprise support transfers or subsidies.

Working conditions and occupational safety and health (OSH). Working conditions have been challenged during the pandemic. A first response came from the OSH front where considerable efforts have been made to ensure safe and healthy workplaces to avoid contagion of workers as well as third parties. Stay at home orders converted households into workplaces, sparking additional challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, unavailability of technical equipment and internet connection, ergonomics and work-life balance.

Support to enterprises. In terms of support to specifically target economic units within the Q2 of 2020, all governments in the Caribbean took measures to provide some level of liquidity to formal businesses, especially those most affected by lockdowns. As time elapses, and the pandemic lingers or comes back in waves, governments will have less and less space to continue to provide these types of measures alone. Some countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, the Cayman Islands, Curaçao, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Trinidad and Tobago) have begun to explore a wider variety of measures or a bundle of policies with the aim to move beyond providing financial relief and toward businesses being better fit to navigate the difficulties, adapt to new ways of doing business or enter into new sectors, as a means of making the private sector on the whole, more resilient.

Legislation and related measures. In the area of legislation and other measures, Caribbean countries have taken a variety of measures to respond to issues on employment and working conditions. In terms of types of measures, some countries amended their labour legislation. In other countries, the existing legislation was implemented or its contents were clarified to the stakeholders for better implementation. There was a case in which employers and workers reached an agreement on special measures. In terms of the subject matters addressed, the measures dealt with issues such as working time (which may be shortened or extended), wages (which may be reduced in certain cases), temporary layoff (period extended for retention of employment), and flexible modalities of work (teleworking or working from home). In one case, a general measure was adopted to allow the Cabinet to authorize exemption from the provisions of labour legislation (Cayman Islands).

Social dialogue. Social dialogue has been an integral part of most coordinated policy responses, but some gaps have emerged. On the one hand, workers' and employer's organizations effectively addressed the challenges of the pandemic by engaging with MOL and MOH to identify challenges and craft responses to protect workers and keep businesses afloat, while playing a pivotal role with the groups they represent by providing guidance and information during the pandemic. At the policy level, while stakeholders in the tourism sector were heavily involved in tripartite discussions - where they did occur - other essential actors were less involved - specifically those in the agriculture and entertainment industries. More troubling is that discussions have not always resulted in jointly supported interventions by unions and employers, with such interventions taking place in less than half the countries.

► How can they be further improved?

Labour market policies and social protection. In the current context, notwithstanding the need to continue providing emergency relief, the focus should be on avoiding the scarring effect and preventing long-term unemployment. Providing the adequate support to vulnerable groups, and allowing employers to co-determine skilling and employability needs have gained absolute importance, while skilling / reskilling programmes may need to move to online modalities. This will be even more compelling for the youth who bore the brunt of the current crisis and run the risk of suffering dire consequences over the longer term, thereby aggravating a situation, which, even before the COVID-19 crisis, saw them struggling to successfully join the labour market.

Overall, while providing immediate support to those affected has been achieved the most, there still seems to be issues of coordination, and in particular, employment services may not have played their potentially coordinating role to the full extent to facilitate structured flow of beneficiaries aimed at reintegration or skills

upgrade. Employment services - together with educational institutions - should, now more than ever, strive to identify the concrete skill needs and demand for given jobs and identify rising and down-ward occupations.

For what concerns cash transfers or other relief measures such as food provision, notwithstanding their immediate effectiveness, the actual longer-term benefit to the population and the accuracy of targeting, will have to be assessed. Sustained financing of such measures needs to be examined against fiscal space, as well as mechanisms considered within each country. More than this, however, a fundamental question lies ahead: while cash injections to cope with the pandemic have become common, funds are mostly channelled to finance temporary cash transfers and do not have strategic components to address the need to have comprehensive social protection systems that will be ready to support shocks. Similarly, infusion targeted at bolstering (labour) productivity are still mostly vague and seldom reflect a development policy going beyond the yearly budgetary horizon.

In addition, the most recent development in the region and the operating procedures established to dispatch relief funds suggest that countries of the region should transform temporary income replacement programmes into a fully-fledged system of unemployment insurance based on full integration of data sources and effective linkages with active labour market programmes. Having a clear and real time overview of the beneficiaries of the unemployment insurance as well as their profile in terms of labour market experience, educational attainment and industries of employment will help quantifying at the nation level, the extent of the vulnerability as well as providing precious information, should any crisis occur in the next future. The same approach should be followed by other social protection programmes addressed to the poor and vulnerable. The effective combination of contributory and non-contributory social protection programmes, underpinned by good governance mechanisms, is the backbone of universal social protection systems that are responsive to shocks.

► Text box 5

Fiscal space for social protection and reliance on social security schemes

The ILO¹⁰⁴ has estimated that closing the gap to achieve universal social protection in 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean (as set out in the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and SDG targets 1.3 on social protection and 3.8 on universal health coverage), would require additional investments of USD333.2 billion, equivalent to 7.5 per cent of their GDP and 27.9 per cent of the total tax revenue in 2019. This financing gap has increased by approximately 30 per cent since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis as a result of the increased need for health-care services and income security.

Emergency measures to replace income to the unemployed has shown the importance to count on solid social insurance mechanism to provide financing. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, unemployment insurances in Barbados and The Bahamas have disbursed some USD100 million to fund approximately 50,000 unemployment benefits. This funding has been made available through the reserves of social security funds. The National Insurance Corporation of Saint Lucia, albeit not in charge of an established unemployment insurance benefit, has used USD22.3 million of its reserves to fund 16,595 economic relief benefits. Although this extraordinary use of reserves has reduced in approximately 5 months the date by when reserves would be depleted (i.e. 2051),¹⁰⁵ the relief provided to a large number of households and the money injected to the economy to support the demand represent a solid rationale to consider the use of social security reserves to provide relief during the pandemic.

On top of social security reserves, fiscal space for social protection could be found by: i) expanding social security coverage and contributory revenues, ii) increasing tax revenues, iii) eliminating illicit financial flows, iv) reallocating public expenditures, v) using fiscal and central bank foreign exchange reserves, vi) managing debt: borrowing or restructuring sovereign debt, vii) adopting a more accommodating macroeconomic framework, and viii) increasing Overseas Development Assistance and transfers.¹⁰⁶

Support to enterprises. While it can be expected that businesses and governments will have to continue operating with high levels of uncertainty about the future, governments in the Caribbean should start or continue to explore policies that further help to diversify the countries' economies, digitize processes and foster entrepreneurial activity and investments in new sectors such as the green and blue sectors. Specifically, while countries may wish to continue to support the survival of businesses deemed as key for different reasons (employment, historic reasons, political, economic or socially strategic), governments should explore policies seeking to ignite private sector development in more and diverse new sectors. These efforts to reposition existing businesses and/or create new businesses will not only help diversify the economy and limit the overdependence on tourism or extractive industries, but prepare the private sector as a whole to better push through this and other crises of a similar nature.

Closely linked to policies that foster diversification, there remains a need for Caribbean governments to continue to work on policy interventions which help provide an enabling environment and incentives for innovative start-ups to expand, close and divert to other business goals. It is essential to have medium- to longer-term policies that support entrepreneurship and innovation, and that make it easier for potential entrepreneurs to innovate in response to market changes post-COVID-19 and to change their products, services and business models. Given the size of the countries in the region, as well as the similar challenges and opportunities they face when it relates to the green and blue economy, governments could consider exploring and partnering in regional efforts.

104 ILO. 2020. '[Social protection spotlight. Financing gaps in social protection: Global estimates and strategies for developing countries in light of the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.](#)'

105 Upon request of the NIC, in March 2020 the ILO calculated that if benefits would have been paid in the following three months for an additional amount of ECD145 million, this would have had the social security fund completely depleted one year earlier (i.e. 2050) than reported in the latest actuarial review (i.e. 2051).

106 Ortiz, Isabel, Anis Chowdhury, Fabio Durán-Valverde, Taneem Muzaffar, and Stefan Urban. 2019. Fiscal space for social protection. A handbook for assessing financing options. ILO.

Finally, governments should consider the importance of investing in proper channels to conduct surveys, record and keep track of realities faced by the private sector. Keeping up-to-date records of businesses and sectors may help in collecting essential data as the pandemic evolves and future crises arise, to better understand the impacts and by inference, anticipate possible solutions. Partnerships and close contact with employer organizations can help in this regard. Governments should consider along with any policies, a system to help monitor progress and results of the policies put in place so as to help them make real time decisions to tweak them or adopt new ones. This will be of vital importance in cases like this where the pandemic is unfolding, and doing so in waves and at different speeds. Different phases of the pandemic will require different policy responses, and governments must be in a position to find the right policy balance.

Legislation and related measures

Legislation and related measures. Caribbean countries would be able to better respond to similar situations such as COVID-19 by ensuring that relevant laws and regulations are in place and by making practical guidance available. The existing laws might be amended or new laws might be adopted, which would set out principles that must be held even during emergency, provide for special protection for employers and workers, and which would lay out necessary flexibilities. For these purposes, it would be advisable to collect lessons learnt from developing and implementing the legislative and other measures. It would be also useful to hold Caribbean-wide dialogues to share experiences. Continuation of current responses to OSH challenges, based on precise guidance, timely advocacy and tripartite negotiation, is to be encouraged.

The role for social partners and social dialogue. Systematic resort to social dialogue must be the norm in all cases. Changes must be made in order to ensure this happens in every country. Acknowledging that there is no “one-size fits all” type of dialogue, there are few recommendations which may be valuable. First, it is essential to start the social dialogue process as early as possible. Second, it is the recommendation to involve the social partners at all stages of responses: from initial needs assessment to the formulation of measures, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Third, emergency mechanism to allow discussions and negotiations in crisis situations may be preemptively discussed at the country level with the objective of allowing full participation without compromising the timing of the response.

Specifically concerning EBMOs, the recommendation is to pursue ongoing efforts to build enterprise resilience, and make necessary organizational adaptations including repositioning and renovating service delivery and improving advocacy efforts through research.



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► Annexes



Photo compliments pxhere.com

► Annex I: Border reopening dates and travel restrictions (as of 11 October 2020)

Country	Border reopening dates - commercial air travel	Updated October 2020. (n.b. by 2 November 2020, Antigua and Barbuda and Barbados confirmed withdrawal from CARICOM Bubble, see text for details)
AIA	No date announced	Anguilla gradually reopened its borders from 21 August. It has not yet open to commercial air travel but only private charters approved on a case-by-case basis and flights from Sint Maarten and Antigua and Barbuda are operational. Visitors must apply to visit (subject to case-by-case approval) and complete polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests within a required timeframe. Mandatory quarantining is also in place.
ATG	4 June	Antigua and Barbuda has officially reopened its borders to international visitors. All passengers arriving by air must have a negative COVID-19 real time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) test result, taken within seven days of their flight. Beginning 18 September, persons in the CARICOM Bubble will not be required to take COVID-19 tests in order to travel to countries that are within the Bubble, nor undergo a period of quarantine upon arrival. On 2 November 2020, however, Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister, the Hon. Gaston Browne, stated that the CARICOM Bubble had burst. ¹
ABW	1 July	As of 1 July 2020, Aruba reopened its borders to visitors from the Caribbean, Europe, the United States of America (USA) and Canada. If travellers cannot obtain a negative-PCR test within 72 hours of departure, they can be tested upon arrival in Aruba. As of 10 July, travellers originating from certain USA States are now considered high-risk and do NOT have the option of pre-paying for a test and having it done on arrival.
BHS	1 July	All international commercial flights were banned from entering The Bahamas, effective Wednesday 22 July. Exemptions were made for visitors from the United Kingdom, the European Union and Canada who have tested negative. On 31 July 2020, The Bahamas lifted its ban on travellers from the USA and announced that travellers will be required to present a negative COVID-19 test or quarantine for 14 days upon entry into the country. Tourism relaunch is set for 15 October.

¹ See https://www.winnmediaskn.com/barbados-pulls-out-of-caricom-travel-bubble/?fbclid=IwAR1yMjj-lwY4n776W-4jmpTdZDYt02tRPSx7p32HV7uqj1urr_3e9v5yaINo

Country	Border reopening dates - commercial air travel	Updated October 2020
BRB	12 July	Open to visitors from all countries, Barbados has divided countries into categories: very low risk, low risk, medium risk, and high risk. Testing and isolation requirements vary by risk level. Beginning 18 September, persons in the CARICOM Bubble (four participating countries) will not be required to take COVID-19 tests in order to travel to countries that are within the Bubble, nor undergo a period of quarantine upon arrival.
BLZ	15 August	Belize's international border reopened (International Airport) on 1 October.
BMU	1 July	Bermuda's borders have reopened as of 1 July to all visitors and its international airport to regular air traffic. All tourists are charged a US\$75 fee to cover COVID-19 tests on arrival
BVI	No date announced	The British Virgin Islands is scheduled to reopen its borders to international visitors on 1 December. The Government is using a controlled phased approach to reopen the Territory's borders. Phase 1 commenced on 2 June for Virgin Islanders, belongers, naturalized citizens and permanent residents. Phase, which began on 1 September, allowed for several new categories to be permitted into the Territory (Example: including work permit holders, retirees and homeowners, diplomats, etc.)
CYM	No date announced	The Cayman Islands began reopening its borders in phases from 1 Oct. As a part of the first phase, borders are opened to approved visitors, property owners, workers and residents. Eight hundred non-resident travellers were allowed in during the month of October. Commercial flights outside of Cayman Airways and British Airways and private charters will not be allowed. Approved travellers will need to show proof of a negative COVID-19 (RT-PCR) test taken within 72 hours of departure and upon arrival into the country, travellers will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days at home or in hotels and will be asked to wear an electronic tracking device. Details of reopening protocols are still being finalized.
CUW	1 July	At this time Curaçao is still not accepting flights/travellers from the USA. List of countries where a negative PCR test is required is available online.
DMA	15 July	Dominica is open to visitors from all countries. All new arrivals must take a coronavirus test 24-72 hours prior to arrival. Beginning 18 September, persons in the CARICOM Bubble will not be required to take COVID-19 tests in order to travel to countries that are within the Bubble, nor undergo a period of quarantine upon arrival.

Country	Border reopening dates - commercial air travel	Updated October 2020
GRD	1 July	Grenada reopened in phases. Phase 1 began 15 July allowing flights and travellers from CARICOM countries. Phase 2 began on 1 August opening to Canada, the UK, the USA, and selected European countries. Entry requirements are determined by risk status.
GUY	1 August	Guyana is reopening its borders in phases. Phase 1 (commenced June 2020) saw some repatriation charter flights being approved to bring locals home. Phase 2 (October 2020) saw the return of some commercial flights for Guyanese citizens, international workers and diplomats without the requirement of the repatriation form. Phase 3 (TBD) is proposed to have an expansion of commercial flights that will allow other foreign nationals and travellers to enter Guyana. Phase 4 (TBD, possibly in 2021) will see the expansion of flight routes in and out of the country to provide more service for inbound and outbound tourists.
JAM	15 June	Open to visitors from all countries. All arriving passengers to Jamaica are required to have a Travel Authorization prior to check-in for flights to Jamaica. All residents of the USA, Brazil, The Dominican Republic and Mexico, who are 12 years of age or over, with travel dates of 20 August 2020 or later, are required to obtain a COVID-19 PCR test.
MSR	No date announced	Borders remain closed to general arrivals. Persons who are allowed to travel to Montserrat are: Montserratians, permanent residents (spouse, child or other dependent of a Montserratian or permanent resident), member of the crew of an aircraft or ship, non-resident technician and anyone who owns a habitable house or home in Montserrat. A negative PCR COVID-19 test result, within 7 days prior to entry, is required.
KNA	No date announced	Saint Kitts and Nevis' border remains closed to general arrivals however, it is open for the return of nationals and residents including students of the international universities. Passengers are required to submit an entry form and other travel details to the Government of Saint Kitts and Nevis prior to booking private transportation to the country, and obtain a negative RT-PCR test 72 hours before arrival. All arrivals must observe a minimum of 14 days mandatory quarantine.
LCA	4 June	Saint Lucia is open to visitors from all countries. Different entry requirements are in effect if the trip originates from outside of the travel Bubble (selected Caribbean countries). All arriving passengers, including those arriving from within the designated travel Bubble, must have a negative result from a PCR test taken no more than 7 days before arriving in Saint Lucia.

Country	Border reopening dates - commercial air travel	Updated October 2020
VCT	1 July	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is open to visitors from all countries. Travelers from high- and medium-risk countries must have a negative PCR COVID-19 test result within five days of arrival. Passengers from high and medium-risk countries will be re-tested upon arrival. Beginning 18 September, persons in the CARICOM Bubble will not be required to take COVID-19 tests in order to travel to countries that are within the Bubble, nor undergo a period of quarantine upon arrival.
SXM	15 June	A RT-PCR test, performed within 120 hours prior to departure to Sint Maarten (last leg in case of connecting flights), is required for all travellers originating from a country that is categorized as high or moderate risk. Travelers residing in, and traveling from low-risk countries are exempted from the mandatory RT-PCR test. Travellers from the USA may enter Sint Maarten, however, they cannot cross the border into Saint Martin.
SUR	No date announced	Suriname closed its borders to all persons and flights starting 14 March. On 27 September the President announced that Suriname will allow direct passenger traffic from the Netherlands and resume domestic flights within the country. With regards to the international flights, passengers must submit a negative COVID-19 test and are required to be quarantined for 10 days on arrival. (No exact date was given for commencement of plan).
TTO	No date announced	Travel between Trinidad and Tobago is currently restricted to essential travel only, with a restricted inter-island service in operation. International travel remains restricted and requires an exemption from the Ministry of National Security.
TCA	22 July	The Turks and Caicos is open to all visitors as of 22 July. All travellers must have proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken no more than five days before departure and must obtain travel pre-authorization via the TCI Assured Portal.

► Annex II: List of countries that borrowed from international organizations in response to the pandemic

Lending institution and type of financing	Borrowing country	Details
International Monetary Fund (IMF): Rapid Financial Instrument	The Bahamas	On 1 June 2020, the IMF approved the disbursement of USD250 million to The Bahamas. The emergency financial assistance comes under the IMF's Rapid Finance Instrument, representing 100 per cent of The Bahamas' quota, and will help meet the country's balance of payments needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
	Jamaica	On 15 May, The IMF Executive Board approved Jamaica's request for emergency financial assistance of approximately USD520 million to help meet the urgent balance-of-payments needs stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.
International Monetary Fund (Extended Fund Facility)	Barbados	On 3 June 2020 the Executive Board of the IMF concluded the third review of the IMF's extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) for Barbados. The completion of the review allows the authorities to draw approximately USD139 million. Barbados requested an augmentation of its existing Extended Fund Facility.
International Monetary Fund: Rapid Credit Facility	Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Lucia	On 28 April, 2020, the Executive Board of IMF approved disbursements to Dominica, Grenada, and Saint Lucia following their requests under the Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) mechanism, with a combined SDR48 million (USD65.6 million), to help cover their balance of payment needs stemming from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Disbursements to all three countries are set at the maximum available access under the RCF instrument of 100 per cent of quota for Grenada (SDR16.4 million or USD22.4 million) and Saint Lucia (SDR21.4 million or USD29.2 million), and 89.4 per cent of quota for Dominica (SDR10.3 million or USD14 million).

Lending institution and type of financing	Borrowing country	Details
Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)	Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname	The CDB made available emergency loans to seven Caribbean countries, in the first instance, to finance the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Bank's Board of Directors approved a total of USD66.7 million for Antigua and Barbuda (USD13 million), Belize (USD15 million), Dominica (USD2.5 million), Grenada (USD5.9 million), Saint Lucia (USD10.8 million), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (USD11.3 million), and Suriname (USD8.2 million).
CAF Development Bank of Latin America	Trinidad and Tobago	CAF Development Bank of Latin America signed two loans with Trinidad and Tobago to respond to the health emergency caused by COVID-19 and to mitigate the economic, financial and social effects of the pandemic in the country. The first loan of USD100 million, will provide financial support to the Government's economic programmes, implemented to contain the social, economic and financial emergencies generated by COVID-19, and aims to have a counter cyclical impact on the country's economy. The second loan, of USD50 million, will contribute to the strengthening Trinidad and Tobago's health system capacity to respond to the crisis caused by COVID-19, through direct financial resources, and the recognition of expenses and investments aimed at reducing the risk or mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the health of the population.

Sources: 'Emergency Financing by Region', IMF, accessed 14 October 2020; 'CDB to Provide Almost USD67 Million to Seven Caribbean Countries to Counter the COVID-19 Crisis', Caribbean Development Bank, Caribank, 18 May 2020; 'CAF Lends USD150 Million to Respond to the COVID-19 Emergency in Trinidad and Tobago', CAF, accessed 14 October 2020.

► Annex III: Number of beneficiaries for designated emergency COVID-19 relief transfers - selected Caribbean countries, Q1-Q3 2020

Country	Application for grants received	Grants accepted/ administered	Grants accepted/ administered as percentage of population	Date updated	Details
AIA	-	10,792	Not Applicable	28 Oct 2020	Unaudited data from the Social Security Board. It represents the cumulative number of individual payments to persons (most of whom would have been paid in multiple months) and includes payment for both unemployment (94 per cent) and underemployment (6 per cent)
BHS	Not indicated	43,996	11.2	16 Aug 2020	Under the Government's Self Employment Administered Programme, NIB paid 7,183 customers. This Programme is now closed. Under NIB's Unemployment Benefit Programme, 36,813 claimants have been paid.
BRB	42,000	23,500	8.2	4 Jul 2020	As of September 2020, the National Insurance of Barbados paid over 23,500 benefits for a total of over BBD55 million.

Country	Application for grants received	Grants accepted/ administered	Grants accepted/ administered as percentage of population	Date updated	Details
BLZ	81,052	46,652	11.7	5 Jun 2020	Up to 5 June, a total of 44,552 applications have been approved by the Economic Oversight Team and have been passed to CITO for transmission to SSB for payment. Of these, approximately 45 per cent were recently laid off persons, 24 per cent were self-employed persons who lost their jobs; and 31 per cent applied as long-term unemployed persons. About 94 per cent of all approved applications have been successfully paid. The remaining 6 per cent have been returned as “unpayable” due to bank information problems and attempts to obtain correct payment information from applicants continue.
BMU	Not indicated	10,100	16.2	3 Jul 2020	USD43 million paid in unemployment benefits.
BVI	7,650	1,738	5.7	24 Jul 2020	Out of 7,650 claims made to access part of the Government’s USD10 million Unemployment Relief Fund, 1,738 people have received a total of USD2,421,238.32,
GRD	Not indicated	7,000	6.2	30 Sep 2020	More than 7,000 Grenadians have benefitted thus far from Government’s economic stimulus package which offers payroll support to businesses, income support to self-employed persons and an unemployment benefit (paid by the National Insurance Scheme) among other measures. Overall, Government has expended more than ECD17 million on the various measures in the stimulus package.
JAM	Not indicated	440,000	14.8	12 Aug 2020	-

Country	Application for grants received	Grants accepted/ administered	Grants accepted/ administered as percentage of population	Date updated	Details
KNA	Not indicated	21,517	37.3	31 Aug 2020	As at 31 August 2020, a grand total of ECD 20,344,755 was disbursed. For the month of April 8,275 persons were paid amounting to ECD7,982,206.49. For the month of May, 7,964 persons were paid amounting to ECD7,679,212.44; and for the month of June, 5,278 persons were paid amounting to ECD5,033,475.36.
LCA	Not indicated	18,853	8.6	20 Aug 2020	By the end September 2020, the Economic Relief Programme of Saint Lucia, administered by the National Insurance Corporation, paid benefits to 18,853 unemployed persons for a total expenditure of USD25.5 million
VCT	3164	2,596	2.34	12 Jun 2020	As of 12 June 2020, the Government paid Displacement Supplementary Income to 1,496 Vincentians. To date, the monthly ECD300 payment to these 1,496 Vincentians has cost the Government ECD1.02 million. One thousand and one hundred Vincentians received a similar ECD300 per month via the Unemployment Benefit offered by the National Insurance Services.
SXM	809	622	1.5	23 Sep 2020	In total, there had been 340 individually approved applicants for the Income and Support Programme from April to July and 77 denied applicants. There were 282 applicants for the unemployed programme for the same period and 110 rejected.
TTO	Not indicated	74,549	5.2	8 Sep 2020	74,549 Salary Relief Grants totalling TTD112 million. The breakdown of the grants distributed monthly are as follows: April - 28,948; May - 24,836; June - 20,765

Notes: The Bahamas: Source is [NIB press statement](#); Barbados: Data on Unemployment fund. Not other relief programmes such as "Adopt a Family" or "Household Survival Programme"; Belize: Unemployment Relief Program not including cash transfers for nationwide emergency food assistance programme or BOOST programme-social protection scheme for the most vulnerable; Jamaica - Only [We CARE grants](#); Saint Lucia: Data for The Economic Relief Programme for contributors to NIC. Does not include Self Employed Subsistence Allowance and Income Support Programme for non-contributors



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