

ACTION

ASIAN COLLECTIVE INFORMATION

Newsletter

Third Edition
September 2020

INNOVATION IN THE NEW NORMAL



মহামারী ও
পরিবেশের চাই
নারী-পুরুষের
সমতা।
বিলুপ্ত

নারী শ্রমিকের
পোড়ন কাজ
পোড়ন জীবন
নিশ্চিত কর।
বিলুপ্ত

নারীর প্রতি
অশালীন
আচরণ
বন্ধ কর।
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অভিমানী
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স্বাধীনতা
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নিশ্চিত কর
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A homeworker survived covid-19 by working with a mask, Courtesy of Trade Union Rights Centre (TURC)

DGB Bildungswerk BUND Asia Program 2019–2021 presents the third edition of ACTION Newsletter. This newsletter series is an attempt to expand personal and organisational knowledge among DGB BW’s Asia partners and to strengthen regional and international solidarity in trade union and labour movements. The theme of this edition is INNOVATION, and it showcases the ingenious adaptability of DGB-BW’s partner organisations in Asia to the unprecedented COVID-19 times.

Despite the world around us plunging into dark times – or because of it – we wanted to celebrate the ‘Never Give Up’ spirit of DGB BW’s partner organisations, which are continuously pushing the boundaries of their agility and adaptability, inventing new methods and tools to continue their work with workers and unions, as well as strengthening the leadership of women and youth in the labour movement, regardless of the current difficult conditions. In this edition, you will be amazed at how partners maximised their non-digital outreach within the restrictive conditions, and encouraged the use of digital technology to further increase their reach.

BILS used technology to maintain its communication with workers and unions, and digitised their movement and campaigns. IASEW is continuing its mission of bridging the gap between the government and women in marginalised communities in the informal economy, providing 360°

support to them during COVID times. ITUC-AP shines the light on how to turn obstacles into opportunities, giving us a lesson or two on fantastic monitoring strategies during COVID-19 lockdown, and leaving us with the joyously inspiring story of Sis. Heng Chenda’s bravery in negotiating with the Cambodian government and employers for the rights of garment workers. TURC provides a detailed overview of their innovative work, but one that stands out distinctly is the empowerment of highly skilled women home-based tailors who sewn PPE such as hazmat suits and non-medical masks at a time when they had stopped getting their usual garment sewing work. Creating waves of optimism, this innovative activity soon grabbed eyeballs on social media and continues to be a highly successful initiative till date.

VGCL shares its five initiatives to support workers, as well as its mission-oriented approach towards the long-term handling of the impacts of COVID-19 on workers and trade unions. And speaking of Innovation: Ever heard of Rice ATMs? Read on and you’ll find out about this and all the interesting steps taken by VGCL.

Solidarity is the lifeblood of unions. Through BWI’s sensitively articulated narrative, we get a sense of unions without borders, firmly etching on our hearts all that’s right with the labour movement that we so love.

We go into the world of construction workers who build our homes and offices, but during COVID-19 lockdowns find themselves hungry, stranded, lonely and unable to go back home. In this moment, the support of unions takes on a whole new meaning. In the same vein, SLD portrays the lives of even more groupings of marginalised informal workers, presenting a moving tale of the millions that continue to suffer silently. The images of migrant workers walking thousands of kilometres from urban centres to their native villages grabbed national headlines and the imagination of many Indians. It is vulnerable workers such as this that SLD tried to help and support through an army of volunteers and field organisers. Did we mention that SLD also continued doing what they do best? Strong evidence-based research examining various aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on informal workers in key sectors.

Speaking of the pandemic, who can forget the frontline workers? Thanks PSI, for telling the world that frontline workers are not just healthcare workers, but also many other unrecognised workers in public services who strive in the power sector, sanitation departments and in high risk jobs such as disposing of dead-bodies of patients infected with COVID-19. Through a series of short sketches of four frontline workers, we get sensitised to the plight of frontliners who are combating high levels of stress, battling stigma, worrying about their families, while continuing to show up at work every day. PSI's innovative activities to support young workers in public services across Asia are both timely and inspiring.

Through the support of Indonesia-based Trade Union Rights Centre (TURC) as the facilitating organisation, we bring to you these newsletters every six months. The purpose is to get you more connected and bring you closer together. So, participate actively and circulate widely!



Postcard to PM: Selected Indian Affiliates of BWI launched a month-long 'Postcard Campaign' on 9th August 2020 with a target of 2 million postcards to the Prime Minister of India against labour law 'reform'

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HOW WE WORKED AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



BILS has adopted a different strategy and action during this pandemic, including the ‘Work from home’ approach in the beginning, and ‘roster duty’ modality after the government eased public movement restrictions from 31 May.

BILS organised a number of virtual events with successful and effective participation of trade unions. NTUC leaderships adopted a ‘new normal’ situation with increased virtual activeness. BILS conducted digital awareness of its beneficiaries of migration sector on violence against women through telephonic communication. BILS produced and published a ‘thanks video to frontline fighters’, which has been appreciated widely, and has also produced online campaign materials and significantly increased virtual activities.

Then, BILS is conducting a virtual rapid assessment on ‘COVID19 and its impact on livelihood of workers in fisheries through the new approach of telephonic survey. BILS directly provided relief support to BILS beneficiaries as well as served to provide linkage support between potential beneficiaries and the government.



Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies

House # 20 (3rd Floor), Road #11 (New), 32 (Old), Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209, Bangladesh.

Phone: +88-02-9143236
9120015
9126145
Fax: +88-02-58152810

bils@citech.net
bilslrsc@gmail.com

bilsbd.org
www.facebook.com/bilsbd/

Through the DGB-BW project, BILS-LRSC at Chattogram organised an online May Day Discussion, a human chain program demanding job security and safety of occupational health, in which 15 banners were hung at different industrial areas of the city to draw the attention of the stakeholders. All the programmes involved participation of a small group of people, utilised technologies and maintained adequate social distance with physical safety measures.

Still, the danger of COVID-19 is real but to some extent, BILS managed to keep its project activities ongoing while ensuring limited physical presence, maintaining social distance, and using all the latest possible virtual technologies available. We also regularly shared labour related updates with all concerned over BILS-LRSC Messenger Groups, BILS News Archive and BILS Discussion group operated by BILS head offices at Dhaka and Chattogram.

LINKAGES IN INDIA AND NEPAL BRING RELIEF TO STRANDED MIGRANT WORKERS

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns saw millions of migrant workers across India and Nepal staring at an uncertain future with no work as economic activities came to a standstill. Workers in the vast informal sector, comprising mainly migrants, faced a challenging situation and many were stranded in cities facing grave economic and food crisis as lockdowns got implemented from the 4th week of March to contain the threat and spread of COVID-19.

The DGB-BW partner organisations (BWI Affiliates) played an active role in mitigating the problems faced by workers, including migrants. They lobbied for a relief package from the Government, and also assisted in linking the workers to this relief once it was announced. This was evident both within India and Nepal and across the borders between the two countries. Strong cross border solidarity also came into action. Migrants from Odisha State (India) working in Kathmandu (Nepal) were stranded and faced a food crisis during the lockdown. They contacted their union back home in their native state in India, which in turn reached out to the unions in Nepal. Displaying cross border solidarity, the Central Union of Painters, Plumbers, Electro and Construction Workers (CUPPEC), part of BWI-NAC



BWI • BHI • BTI • IBB • ICM

Building and Wood Workers International

BWI South Asia Project Office
A - 364, First Floor, Defence
Colony, New Delhi
110024

www.bwint.org
info@bwint.org



(Nepal Affiliates Committee), made sure that help reached the stranded migrant workers in no time. They received food supplies and were linked to the Nepalese Government's relief program. There are a high number of migrants from India's Odisha state working in Nepal as plumbers. The partner organisations have been collaborating to bring the cross-border migrants into the union folds to protect their rights and address grievances.

Strong union to union collaboration was also visible within India as unions coordinated with one another and reached out to migrant workers to urgently extend help in terms of food and shelter, as well as facilitating their return to their respective native areas.

The Hind Khet Mazdoor Panchayat (HKMP) of Bihar State coordinated with another BWI Affiliate Nirman Mazdoor Sangthan (NMS) in Maharashtra State and provided

assistance to 124 migrant workers stranded in Maharashtra hailing from Bihar State. These migrants were working in an infrastructure project in Pune City, but the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown stalled the project and they were asked to leave. Upon NMS's intervention, necessary provisions (food supplies and shelter) were made available to the migrants and once the situation allowed special trains to be operational, necessary arrangements were made for their return to their native district in Bihar State.

The work of the DGB-BW project partners in India and Nepal amid the COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of solidarity and also reflects the strength of collective and collaborative work across geographical locations in lessening the impact of crisis on workers and their families.

DIGITAL DRIVE

TO STRENGTHEN SOLIDARITY AND PROVIDE INTEGRATED SERVICES



The critical situation resulting from the coronavirus pandemic – the lockdown – is prevailing all across the world, in all sectors in the lives of rich, middle class and poor communities.

It has once again become the main drive of IASEW to bridge the gap between the government and marginalised communities, especially women. We strive to generate awareness not only among the beneficiaries but also the government for it to think vigorously about this sector. IASEW also tried to make this channel more transparent and valuable so that services should reach its real intended beneficiaries.

This pandemic has brought economic distress as well as psychological turmoil, sapping the energy of women. IASEW has taken effort to collectively construct the foundation which could help them to come out from this disastrous situation in an optimistic way.

The extension centre of IASEW became the destination for the community to seek the solutions for their problems and issues. Recently, the government announced that Rs. 500 would be deposited to those citizens who had opened a bank account under the 'JanDhan Yojana', a scheme aimed at connecting citizens with the formal banking system. Our facilitator sisters informed the community nearby about the scheme. IASEW team and facilitators have also been continuously providing handholding support for the community. When our facilitator Leelaben saw that Kaushalya Ben, a senior citizen, was in a distressing situation and had no one to look after her, Leelaben admitted her in the night care centre, where she got all essentials of life and the staff took care of her with utmost affection.



Indian Academy for Self Employed Women

"Krishna Bhuvan", Ellisbridge Corner, Opp. Sakar II, Town Hall, Ahmedabad - 380006, Gujarat, India

+91-79-26577115
+91-79-26580474

Email: sewaacdy@bsnl.in

iasew1905@gmail.com

www.iasew.org
sewaacademy.org



Many religious and charitable trusts are visiting various areas to provide food and our IASEW sisters are helping them in identifying communities who are in serious need of help. They are linking people with the available support and also generating awareness of the precautionary measurements needed. Our facilitators are also distributing grocery kits and cooking food for others, standing like a pillar in this time of crisis.

In addition to direct involvement and support to the communities on the ground in an integrated manner, IASEW is also undertaking various innovative digital drives. Within IASEW, every activity department has their own WhatsApp groups. We have created various WhatsApp groups with communities and beneficiaries such as those with the Community Radio station listeners' group, the Video cooperative members group, the AIR radio listener's group, the Adolescent girls training group, etc. Whatsapp groups are used for communicating with our members and resolving their queries, and they have proved to be a good platform for sharing information, implementation and feedback. Also, telephonic conversations are playing an important role to relieve them by providing authentic information, which heals them with positive energy. We understand the use of digital meeting/training applications, such as Zoom, Google Meet, conference calls and others, and use these online platforms to conduct capacity building training, positive attitude training, etc.

We also conduct online researches using telephonic surveys and applications like Survey Monkey and Kobocollect.

IASEW actively uses videos for digital campaigns. For instance, on the 1st of May, a labour day digital campaign was launched with 30 videos sharing messages (pledges) on different issues like education, health etc. through IASEW's facebook page. Digital video replays are also available. The video films links are shared in WhatsApp groups of youth members of the literacy training department as well as three separate communications groups, accessing 6 to 7 groups.

In addition, we held "Vanchan Yatra" (Reading Journeys) to support people's wellbeing. 31 stories on Gujarati literature were shared with the groups; all these stories provide positive and

inspirational messages required in these stressful times. We also did digital Mushaiyra (Poetry Symposium) on the World Environment Day and created educational video tutorials on several topics.

Time is crucial and the condition of workers is awful, but we are hopeful with the power of organised strength we will overcome this difficult time with the essence of solidarity, hard work, truth and equality.

THESE TOOLS HELP MONITOR BENEFICIARIES EFFECTIVELY



Call it providential, pure luck or sheer grit. Before the COVID-19 pandemic kicked in, the ITUC-AP/DGB BW Project Management Team (PMT) held key activities on schedule. Less than a month after the last activity ended on 17 February 2020, countries in Southeast Asia started restricting movements.

As COVID-19 ravaged lives and families, the trained Women And Youth Representatives (WYRs) and the PMT have been stuck like no other. Community quarantine, movement control order, circuit breaker, state of emergency, large-scale social restrictions (PSBB), or other terms coined by authorities all mean the same – lockdown.

The situation left the PMT relying on written reports from the WYRs for updates on their leadership journey. However, this strategy led to another challenge: tracking eight project indicators was longer than expected. Besides, not many WYRs are capable of writing in English.

While no solution was coming, the pandemic forced countries to impose further movement restrictions. The PMT arranged a virtual meeting with the WYRs and tested the ITUC-AP office-provided online meeting tool. Surprisingly, the virtual meeting found amazing things WYRs were doing during COVID-19. Afterward, the DGB BW approved support for COVID-19 related campaigns. Very timely!

These developments prompted the PMT to revise the report form and added COVID-19 questions. With the revised report form (the third form so far) and the online meeting tool, the PMT held a series of virtual country meetings this time. Each country assigned someone to interpret when needed. This arrangement helped address the language barrier and the challenge of replying to a lengthy form.



International Trade Union Confederation-Asia Pacific

ITUC-AP
South East Asia Office
One Marina Boulevard,
9th Floor NTUC Centre Singapore
018989

Phone: (65) 6327 3590
Fax: (65) 6327 3576

www.ituc-ap.org
www.facebook.com/ITUC-Asia-Pacific

After several online meetings, this revised strategy of getting updates from WYRs revealed several insights. For instance the report form helped set the agenda of each meeting and guide the discussion, we could talk to WYRs to clarify things instantly and collect more information in the process. Suddenly, an online meeting tool taken for granted becomes indispensable. For a WYR with poor internet connection, a written report is the only means of getting information from, but this does not always help.

Then another realisation hit. The pandemic has turned the WYRs into their leader selves, which is not possible in ordinary times. It enabled their faster transformation to exercise and assert leadership skills. COVID-19 has opened doors for WYRs to negotiate with employers and government agencies about the urgent safety of workers, engage government authorities to issue relevant regulations, conduct campaigns to inform the public on the hazards of COVID-19, and hold protests to demand enforcement of related regulations. And these are related to the project indicators.



Photo by Taylor Simpson on Unsplash
Siem Reap, Cambodia

Online meetings have become a new normal. And the use of an online meeting tool is still an innovation for trade unions. During this time, monitoring the WYRs and being able to get updates on their activities using a report form, as shown by the example below, inspires the PMT to look forward to the next reporting period.

Cambodia: As garment workers are losing jobs or are threatened by COVID-19, a woman rises up

Heng Chenda occupies a vice-president position reserved for a woman at the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC). (The project helped create the post.) She attended part 2 of the women and youth capacity building in February 2020. She speaks a few English words, so a written report from her using the project-developed tracking form is not possible.

When COVID-19 raged in Cambodia, it hit the garment sector hard: 60 factories closed permanently and more than 200 suspended operations, mainly due to the absence of orders. Among factories with CLC unions, seven closed, more than 10 suspended operations, affecting 30,000 union members.

Heng Chenda sprang into action promptly since she came from a garment sector federation. She brought up non-payment of salaries and benefits of affected workers. She underwent two levels of negotiations: the first level, companies agreed to pay 60% of salary and seniority compensation (like separation benefits) of workers; and the second level, the labour ministry ordered additional payment or financial support per worker of \$30 from the employer and \$40 from the labour ministry.

To minimise infections, she proposed collective awareness-raising on COVID-19 at the factory level in a tripartite meeting. The partners agreed: the labour ministry and unions would produce information materials, and factories would provide soap gels and other protection items for workers.

YOUNG & FRONTLINER



The rising call made by governments to public service workers to join the frontline and deliver vital public services has been well received. Many worked as nurses and health workers in hospitals, and sanitation and municipality workers were involved in sensitisation, screened suspected patients, disposed infected dead bodies, and collected garbage from home to home or worked as electricity workers, providing round the clock power for our homes. These lifesaving services are the efforts of the millions of public service workers who continue to rise above all challenges and make the delivery of such services possible.

While the virus does not discriminate, our societies' and governments' response does. The innumerable challenges facing the young public service workers have exaggerated the already existing extreme inequality that stalks our societies: lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, sanitisers, gloves and protective gowns; harassment and stigmatisation by management and society; lack of policies and support system for vulnerable and precarious workers; and in some cases, also attacks on health care workers. Despite these challenges, public service workers have heroically risen to the occasion, devoting their careers to helping others, which deserves resources to do their job much more than a billionaire deserves a tax giveaway.

While millions are working from home, many others are still going to work every day. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers had been on the frontlines – not of pandemic response, but of the fight to be considered worthy of a living and dignified wage and lives. Now these workers are the most essential to the maintenance of public services across countries. Many feel lucky to have an income, but most are afraid of exposing themselves to the novel coronavirus, especially without enough protection, or receiving hazard pay.

With imposed lockdowns and travel restrictions in many countries, it has now become impossible to conduct face-to-face meetings. The PSI Young Workers Network understands the importance of virtual meeting and has shifted most of its activities online since the start of the pandemic. We have conducted 2 webinars for young frontline workers – one in South Asia and the other in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, our young workers are requested to join various online webinars on mental health, post-COVID recovery, trade and tax justice. And, on the Public Services Day, 23 June, young workers from across Asia Pacific joined the webinar, co-organised with ILO.

Public Services International (PSI) spoke to young public service workers about their work and the pressure associated with being a frontliner during a global public health crisis.



Public Services International

PSI South Asia Office Old No. 2,
New No 3, Kandasamy Street,
Chandrabagh Avenue Ext.,
Mylapore, Chennai, Tamil Nadu,
India 600004

PSI South East Asia Office
Unit 3-E Cavite Street corner
West Avenue, Quezon City
1105, Philippines

www.world-psi.org
www.facebook.com/PSI4Youth/



Lakshmi Priya, 29, India

“My husband is very worried about my work as sometimes I have to visit infected areas, and jokingly asks me to stay back at my workplace and not to return home”

I work as a Sanitary Inspector in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Since the outbreak of the virus, I have been involved in sensitisation drives and various other awareness campaigns related to the containment of the virus. I have been working with other public service departments like police, health and other government officials to inspect sanitisation, cleansing and disinfection spray work in government and other institutions. Apart from this, I inspect the work done in handling solid waste management. Working for 12-14 hours a day, I also have to take care of my two daughters. My husband is very worried about my work as sometimes I have to visit infected areas, and jokingly asks me to stay back at my workplace and not to return home. At this time, we as municipality workers face two major challenges: first, to protect sanitary workers from getting infected with the virus, and second, to ensure their safety as they are not very aware of and lack PPE. As the pandemic has also given us an opportunity to recover the damage we have done to nature through human beings' selfish wants and demands, we should stop harming our environment and nature, plant more trees, save water and save nature. has also given us an opportunity to recover the damage we have done to nature through human beings' selfish wants and demands, we should stop harming our environment and nature, plant more trees, save water and save nature.

Being a young and active female union member, I seek support from other union members, and this is the best time to show our support and solidarity to all the workers around the world. The one important aspect that I have realised in myself being at the frontline is that I have been given this opportunity to serve people at this very crucial time and I am very happy to be working in public service.

“I would like to say this as my only advice: people, please stay at home and let us do our duty”



Salith Athurupana, 31, Sri Lanka

I work as a nursing officer and have been working on the frontline since the outbreak of the virus. I care for patients in the ICU in the hospital I work. It has been an enormous challenge for nurses like me to work a heavy duty shift with lack of staff. Being a frontline and belonging to the health sector, I would like to say this as my only advice: people, please stay at home and let us do our duty. Since Sri Lanka is a small country and there is a global shortage of PPE, our nurses have taken up the responsibility to produce our own PPE. It is also a very good time for unions and for the union movement to unite and come together and support each other in such unprecedented times.

As the cases have increased, I am now working with suspected as well as confirmed patients, who are in the ICU and under ventilation. Despite the challenges, I have very supportive staff members and the health care system is being recognised as very essential in the broader scale.



Kavitha, 29, India

“We worked day and night to make it happen. The health ministry has tried to operate mini robots to provide tablets and necessities like newspapers and water to patients”

I currently work in the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital as a Record Clerk. Each and every one of us here is working with precaution. After the detection of the third case, we had made arrangements for a precautionary set-up and plans in our hospital premise. After the cases spiked, an isolation building for patients has been made available, consisting of 500 isolated beds on various isolated floors with amenities like ventilators, with sterile environment, which could contain the spread of the virus. It was a challenge to change the normal wards into isolation with various patch works in need of partition, air filters and other technical equipment, all of which have been suggested by the doctors. In doing this, we volunteered ourselves as there was a lack of ward workers and other helpers and staff. We worked day and night to make it happen. The health ministry has tried to operate mini robots to provide tablets and necessities like newspapers and water to patients. We have to be very careful as we might be infected by the virus. I would like to heartily thank all beloved doctors, nurses, and staff who are actively working in the frontline.

“I request everyone who is reading this to stay inside, to practice social distancing and to wash their hands”



Tamanna Alamgir, 22, Bangladesh

I work in the utility sector and, as a unionist, work for domestic and home-based workers' rights. I have been actively following the news since the outbreak of the virus. It is a very alarming situation for our country. Our days have been very difficult and different than usual. Normally, we try to keep ourselves involved with campaigns, activities, meetings and discussions. All of that has been put on hold as people have to stay indoors. This has been a hard transition for many daily wage workers in our country. I request everyone who is reading this to stay inside, to practice social distancing and to wash their hands. If the curve is not flattened, it will prove deadly for our country and for those at the frontlines. Our communities need support and with support we will be able to overcome this crisis.

BUILDING RESILIENT WORKERS COMMUNITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC



Society for Labour and Development (SLD) is a labour rights and labour support organisation. The COVID-19 crisis followed by the nationwide lockdown did not leave much to imagine how workers were going to be affected by it. A large section of the Indian workforce is migrants and the lockdown left them stranded at their work destinations without any job and with little to no savings. The initial lockdown was supposed to be for a week and workers tried to stay wherever they were stranded but the news of the extension of lockdown for another 21 days forced them to think about their survival and those with no or little savings decided to return to their homes.



Society for Labour and Development

C-23, First Floor Hauz Khas
New Delhi -110016

Website: <http://sldindia.org/>

The lockdown did not leave them with an option to return and many resorted to walking back to their homes and before SLD could think of anything to help these workers, the situation started worsening. The organisation decided to get into relief work; however, with limited staff and limited experience of relief work, the challenges before SLD were huge. Being a labour rights and support organisation, SLD also carries out evidence-based research and it was obvious for SLD to start collecting information and documenting the plight of the workers but given the situation, it was another challenge for the organisation to safely carry out research work.

Work continues amid the COVID-19 crisis



The initial nationwide lockdown forced SLD staff to work from home but news of the extension of the lockdown immediately made it clear that there was a need to find ways to work in this time of crisis. It seemed difficult at first but SLD was able to carry out relief work along with sectoral research. SLD primarily works with the garment, leather, domestic workers and recently with seafood processing industry workers. It was not easy for SLD to reach out to workers as the majority of workers SLD works with are part of informal settings except garment workers.

There was limited scope of collaboration with other agencies due to the informal setup in which these workers work; the only way SLD could find was to reach them directly. Some of the initiatives that helped us carry out our work are as follows:

First, training and handholding of field organisers on carrying out relief work in a pandemic. Prior to any activity during this pandemic, it was of utmost importance that SLD field organisers were safe and prepared for the relief work during this unusual environment of restricted mobility and social distancing. The training and instructions were given to the field organisers by the senior staff with experience through calls and texts. PPE

kits were provided to the field organisers and volunteers.

Second, identification of local volunteers. With restricted movements and limited staff, it was difficult to reach the most vulnerable workers. To overcome this, field organisers started identifying volunteers. The volunteers were identified from the workers' community who has some exposure to labour rights and experience of representing workers. This helped SLD identify the worst-hit areas with an immediate requirement for food essentials.

Third, vulnerability mapping. With another extension of the lockdown, the situation started worsening and with limited funds, we had to ensure that the help reached the people with most needs. For this, the field organisers started mapping the most vulnerable workers around. This ensured that no one in our area's operation went empty stomach while we distributed the rations to people who might have access to resources.

Fourth, awareness generation. SLD field organisers played an important role in generating awareness about the importance of social distancing and protective gears, and of government schemes and their benefits.



It was observed that there was an immediate need for information on processes of applying for ration cards as the government announced that people were eligible for the benefits with just the application details in case of no ration cards. The field organisers continuously worked providing assistance in applying for different schemes.

Fifth, establishment of a chain of networking with domestic workers. Delhi NCR, where we work with domestic workers, is one of the most unorganised sectors. The domestic workers live in different parts of the city and organising small scale relief work in various parts of the city was a huge challenge for SLD with limited movement and limited staff. To overcome this, we identified volunteers among the workers and ensured that the areas where we carried out the relief work were well covered. The workers also played a crucial role in carrying out need assessments. This chain of networking resulted in a snowball effect and we got connected to many more workers with an immediate need for food essentials from other parts of the city.

Sixth, production of sectoral reports. During the relief work, SLD staff got connected with workers from different sectors, which had posed a challenge for SLD earlier in this

environment of lockdowns and restricted movements. To keep the workers engaged with the organisation, SLD started collecting information on assessment of the situation and impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Eventually, SLD came out with a report on the effect of this crisis on garment workers. SLD is also working on separate reports on domestic workers, leather and seafood processing industry workers. The report on garment workers in lockdown has been well received and organisations like Asia Floor Wage Alliance, Inkota Network Germany and Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) have published it on their forums.

Lastly, there is a new collaboration with a local civil society organisation. SLD engages in its work through collaboration and long term coalition-building. It was, however, challenging to do so in Veraval, Gujarat; the lockdown and restricted movement eliminated any movement to the place and the only option to start any activities was through collaboration with a local organisation. SLD has identified the organisations to assist in the relief work that has to be carried out among seafood processing industry workers as many factories are barely operational.

Like many other organisations, SLD also believes that the amount of work has increased owing to new roles and responsibilities. This new environment of working has definitely helped SLD in successfully building the capacity of the field organisers in responding to any situation of crisis. Moreover, SLD has been able to distribute dry rations to approximately 600 workers and is in the process of reaching out to 200 workers in Veraval, Gujarat. SLD is also thankful for the immense support from the workers' community in collectively carrying out the relief work as well as from the vendors, who helped the field organisers with logistics in spite of restricted movements.



SAVE THE WORKERS: ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



People vector created by freepik



Trade Union Rights Centre

Jalan Mesjid II, No.28, Pejompongan,
Bendungan Hilir, Tanah Abang, Kota
Jakarta Pusat, Daerah Khusus Ibukota
Jakarta 10210

(+6221) 5744655

www.turc.or.id

[www.facebook.com/TradeUnionRights
Centre/](https://www.facebook.com/TradeUnionRightsCentre/)

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The spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia not only threatens public health and safety, but also impacts on socio-economic conditions, especially in the employment sphere. More than 2 million workers from both formal and informal sectors have been impacted. Not only causing sudden job loss, the pandemic has also led to a food crisis and a mental health crisis experienced by many workers in Indonesia. There is a 38.55% to 44.67% income decline experienced by 4 out of 10 respondents in the survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS). In response to the situation, TURC took two major initiatives in promoting community-based economic empowerment to both home-based and garment sector workers.

We started by collecting data on home-based workers who were economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in six TURC-assisted areas: Jakarta, Tangerang, Sukabumi, Cirebon, Solo, and Sukoharjo. The data we had collected show very alarming economic conditions of home-based workers because some of them were dependent on daily orders and might potentially end up having no income at all because some production was closed. Looking at this phenomenon, TURC felt that it was necessary to contribute to finding other sources of income that could be generated by home-based workers.

We then suggested that home-based workers should shift their production from producing clothes to making a more relevant and necessary product amid the COVID-19 pandemic, that is, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including non-medical masks and hazmat suits. During that period, this movement successfully excited the home-based workers and motivated them to remain productive. This community-based movement received many positive responses from various parties, including the social enterprise that we have the collaboration with, Jahitin – an online personal tailor platform to transform lives of local tailor across Indonesia with education. In total, 22,736 masks and 300 hazmat suits were produced. Also, a profit of IDR39,372,000 was distributed to 37 workers who produced them. As a recommendation, efforts are urgently needed to drive and strengthen economic empowerment for home-based workers to improve home-based workers’ economic condition. “I’m so grateful I got the order to produce thousands of masks, so I had a source of income to pay my bills,” said Aspiyah, a home-based worker from Tangerang.

Meanwhile in the garment sector, almost 14,500 workers (union members) – the beneficiaries of one of TURC’s projects in West Java Province – were also affected by COVID-19. One of the ideas to help them was to propose emergency relief funds to fulfil the basic rights needs of workers in the garment sector. This collaborative effort was supported by Laudes Foundation, and help also came from the local unions, which we expected would strengthen the trade unions presence. The support for the beneficiaries is designed into two schemes: first, Assistance for Safety Equipment, including provision of non-medical masks, hand sanitisers, and vitamin C; this would be given to workers whose workplaces remain open; and second, Assistance for Basic Food, to cover food needs such as rice, cooking oil, and sugar; basic food would be given to workers who had already been sent home without any payment/compensation and/or terminated.

The expected outputs from this support were to provide the self-protective equipment for garment workers in the workplace, to fulfil the basic food needs for workers affected by furlough or layoff, and to strengthen the role and responsibilities of trade unions in providing support and services for their members. This support had reached more than 15,000 garment workers across Sukabumi and Bandung Raya areas, who are all union members and 80% of whom are women.



This movement has brought an indirect impact to reach more than 17 networks of cross-sector worker solidarity; journalists, legal aid and human rights defenders, and other marginalised groups affected by COVID-19 such as home-based workers in Jakarta, Tangerang, Sukabumi and Bandung Raya areas. It has provided a 'new' job for 100 homeworkers to produce 22,736 non-medical masks, and for 67 former garment workers who are affiliates to Indonesia Federation of Trade Union (FSBI/Federasi Serikat Buruh Indonesia) – the members of Trade Union business unit to produce environmentally friendly bags – to package 19,000 aid packages, and directly assist groups of farmers to supply 45 tons rice.



US\$2.6 BILLION SUPPORT PACKAGE FOR VIETNAMESE HIT BY COVID-19



The Vietnamese government has adopted a USD 2.6 billion support package for Vietnamese hit by COVID-19. There are five initiatives taken by VGCL to support our target beneficiaries.

First, we have a series of measures applied to all citizens to control the situation, including urgent requests for citizens to stay at home, closure of all schools and universities, and 14-day free-of-charge quarantine service (with provision of free decent accommodation and meals at a rate of USD4/day) for all travellers from pandemic-prone areas and for people with suspected cases of COVID-19. We also encourage free hospital treatment to all infected patients, blockade of areas with cases of infection, and

prohibition on gatherings of more than 10 people outside offices, schools and hospitals. Public transport, interstate transport and domestic flights are also limited. The other measures include 1) suspension of the entry of all foreigners from March 22 to limit the spread of COVID-19; while the measure will not apply to diplomatic officials and those entering on government business, they will be required to follow quarantine protocols; 2) order to wear masks in public places for those who are in the country; 3) closure of services such as massage parlours, clubs, tourist attractions, recreation centres, entertainment centres, cinemas, bars and restaurants; and 4) ban on all meetings and events of over 20 people for at least 'the next 2 weeks' from March 26, 2020.

Second, there is package distribution to help people most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 1.13 million people with meritorious services to the revolution would each receive additional VND500,000 (US\$23) per month from April to June. About 984,000 poor and near-poor households would each receive VND1 million (US\$43) monthly in the April-June period.

Third, a package to help laid off workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is also distributed. Over 1 million laid off workers would each get VND1.8 million (US\$78) in the next three months. VND 1 million would be given on a monthly basis for three months to an estimated number of five million workers including own-account workers losing their income and



Vietnam General Confederation of Labour

No. 82 Tran Hung Dao Street,
Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi,
Vietnam 10000

+84-24-39425450

www.congdoan.vn

dismissed workers whose social insurance contribution period is not sufficient for unemployment benefit payout. There will be policies in place to help simplify the process of claiming unemployment support for workers. Employees will also temporarily be exempted from their obligatory contributions to the retirement and survivors' fund (part of the Government-sponsored insurance programme).

Fourth, there is a distribution of packages to help the self-employed affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Individual business households with yearly revenues below VND100 million who have to temporarily close down as part of the Government's stay-at-home order and social distancing measures will be given VND 1 million per month over a three-month period. About 760,000 households are eligible for this support.

And the last, commercial banks offer preferential credit packages totalling VND285 trillion (US\$12.39 billion) to affected enterprises. However, interest rates are likely to remain high since the central bank is not involved. It is therefore possible that small and medium businesses will not be able to take advantage of them. There are changes in loan repayment measures: Vietnam's central bank (SBV) ordered commercial banks to eliminate, cut or delay interest payments on loans to companies facing losses due to the coronavirus outbreak during January 23 and March 30. Then, tax payment and land-use fees are delayed for 5 months. Employers can borrow from the Vietnam Social Policy Bank with zero interest rate over 12 months to pay salaries for their furloughed workers in a three-month period. Employers and employees will also temporarily be exempt from their obligatory contributions to the retirement and survivors' fund (part of the Government-sponsored insurance programme).

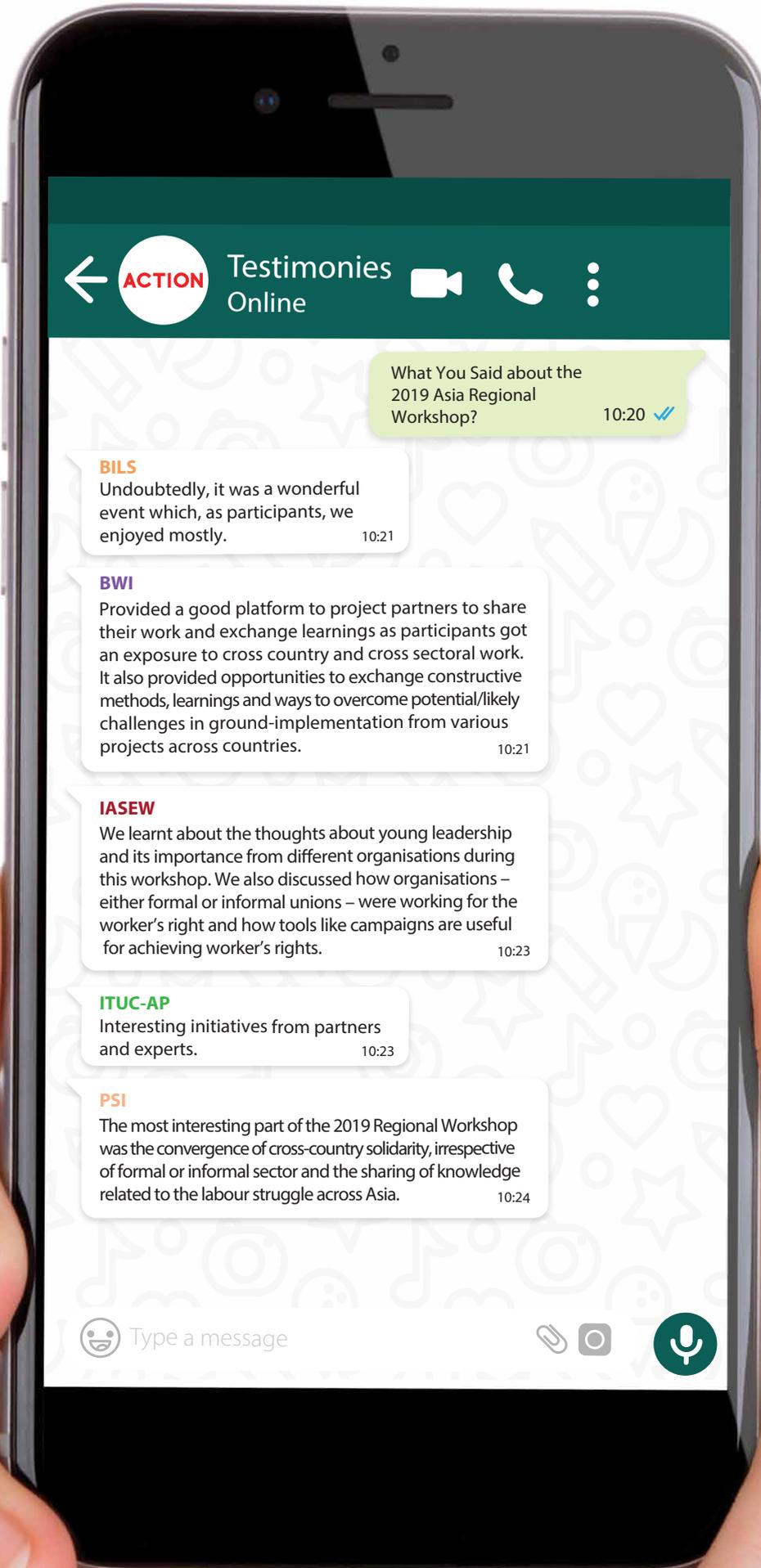
Aside from several policies taken by the Government which were proposed by Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), VGCL itself has implemented a number of measures, as follows:

- Establishment of a Steering Committee on COVID-19 prevention with the task to update information on and development of the COVID-19 pandemic; to conduct research and evaluation of the impacts of COVID-19 on workers' life and employment; to recommend solutions and policies to support workers and union members; to coordinate trade unions' actions in a joint effort of pandemic prevention and control; and to share best practices among trade unions;
- Provision of guidance for our workplace unions to work with managers on applying preventative measures such as food hygiene monitoring, rotation of

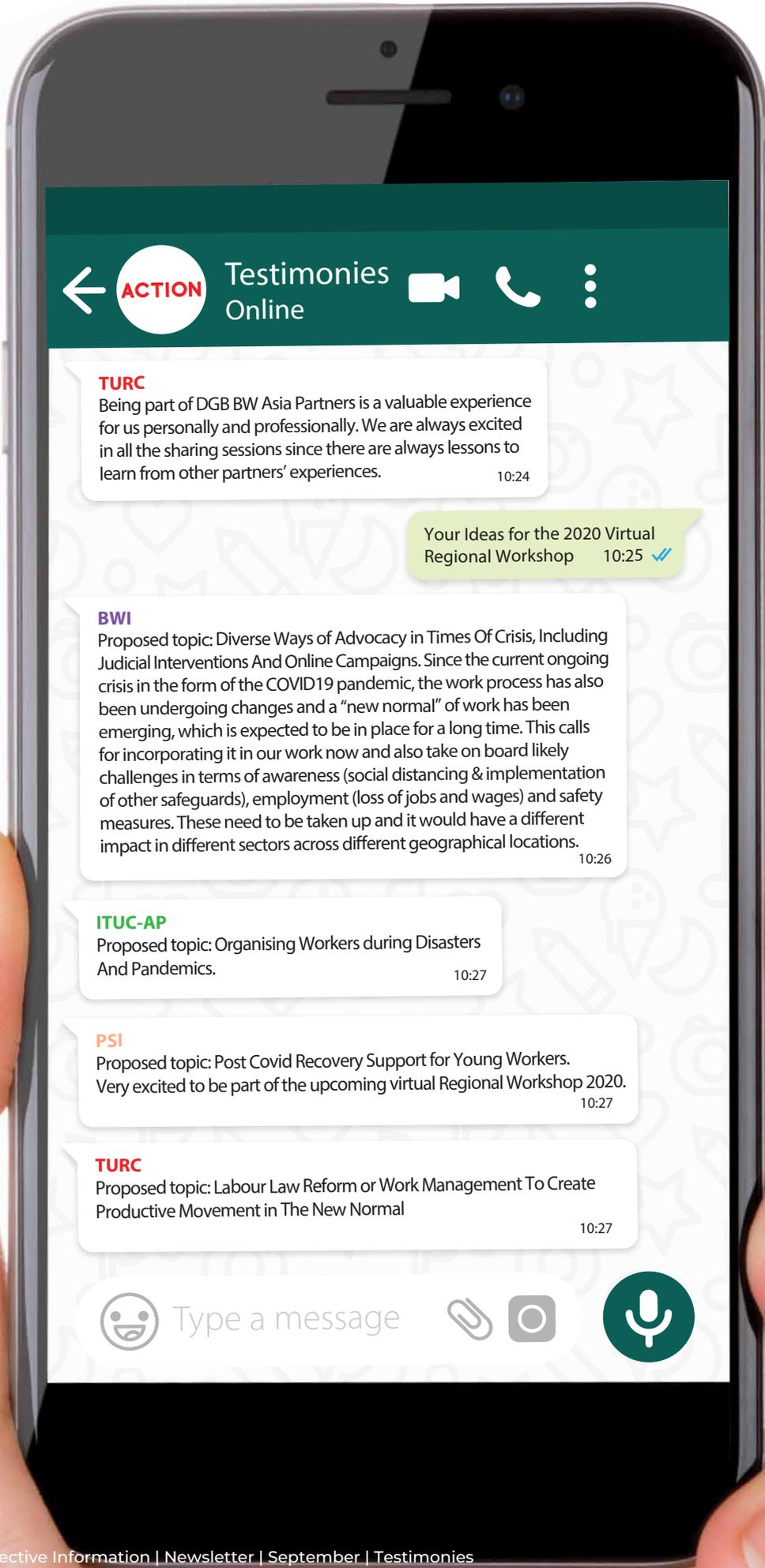
working shift, and staggered working time arrangement. For workers being put in quarantine, the trade unions negotiate a payment of 70% of wages;

- Regular updates by workers and union members on the pandemic, its infection ability, impact on people's health and measures to prevent and avoid infection;
- Promotion of communication (by workplace unions) with workers and members about the pandemic. They also negotiate with employers over provision of free medical masks and hand rubs for all workers, and implementation of safety and sanitation at the workplace;
- Close collaboration between trade unions and managers to find out solutions in order to secure jobs for workers and minimise adverse impacts of unemployment and lay-off;
- Provision (by workplace unions) of medical masks and hand rubs for workers and union members. At the same time, their monitoring of workplace hygiene is also strengthened (spray of Chloramine B - a chemical disinfectant - food and water safety);
- If jobs are at risk due to a shortage of raw materials and auxiliary materials for production, many provincial and city Federation of Labour offices hold meetings to exchange information, and listen to ideas and recommendations to find ways to support union members, including ways to access unemployment insurance benefits;
- COVID-19 will be one of the key topics for the 2020 National Month of Workers starting in May 2020;
- Campaigns by trade unions, such as blood donation, rice ATM (an initiative to distribute free rice which are donated through ATM-like machines), and cash donation, to support frontliners, workers and the affected;
- Issuance of an official letter regarding the delay of payment of trade union funds (2%) for enterprises affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. The affected enterprises can defer the payment to the trade union fund for the first 6 months of 2020 to June 30, 2020, with possibility of further postponement until December 31, 2020;
- Active participation with government in relevant policy making process;
- Monitoring of the implementation of government support packages for workers;
- Provision of an one-time financial support to most affected members with the amount of USD25 and USD50 by Federations of Labour offices at provincial and district level, respectively.

TESTIMONIES



TESTIMONIES



← **ACTION** Testimonies Online

TURC
Being part of DGB BW Asia Partners is a valuable experience for us personally and professionally. We are always excited in all the sharing sessions since there are always lessons to learn from other partners' experiences. 10:24

Your Ideas for the 2020 Virtual Regional Workshop 10:25 ✓

BWI
Proposed topic: Diverse Ways of Advocacy in Times Of Crisis, Including Judicial Interventions And Online Campaigns. Since the current ongoing crisis in the form of the COVID19 pandemic, the work process has also been undergoing changes and a "new normal" of work has been emerging, which is expected to be in place for a long time. This calls for incorporating it in our work now and also take on board likely challenges in terms of awareness (social distancing & implementation of other safeguards), employment (loss of jobs and wages) and safety measures. These need to be taken up and it would have a different impact in different sectors across different geographical locations. 10:26

ITUC-AP
Proposed topic: Organising Workers during Disasters And Pandemics. 10:27

PSI
Proposed topic: Post Covid Recovery Support for Young Workers. Very excited to be part of the upcoming virtual Regional Workshop 2020. 10:27

TURC
Proposed topic: Labour Law Reform or Work Management To Create Productive Movement in The New Normal 10:27

Type a message

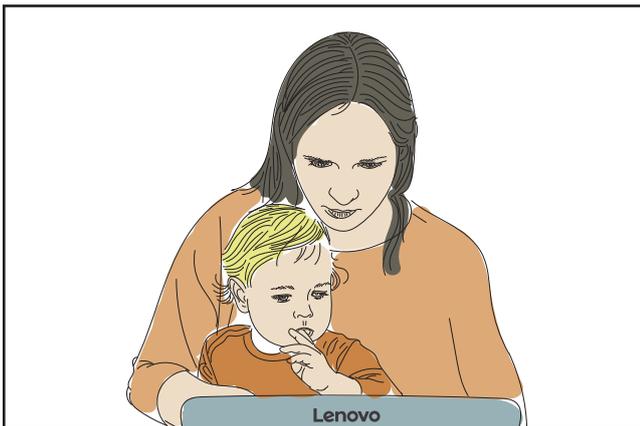
WORKING FROM HOME QUARANTINE PERIOD



What My Boss Thinks



What My Colleagues Think



What My Husband Thinks



What I Think I do



What I really Do

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Editorial team:

Siti Mahdaria, Aditya Warman

Graphic Designer:

Rafi Azano

Photo Cover:

Courtesy of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)

Contributors:

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)

Building and Wood Workers International (BWI)

Indian Academy for Self Employed Women (IASEW)

International Trade Union Confederation Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP)

Public Services International (PSI-AP)

Society for Labour and Development (SLD)

Trade Union Rights Centre (TURC)

Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL)

Secretariat:

Andriko Otang, Dinda Z. Wahid, Siti Munawaroh, Andy Akbar



Jalan Mesjid II No.28, Pejompongan,
Bendungan Hilir,

Jakarta 10210

Telp/Fax. +62 21 5744655

Email: info@turc.or.id

Website: www.turc.or.id

Disclaimer: The content of this newsletter is the responsibility of Trade Union Rights Centre (TURC)