



**ILERA 9th AFRICA REGIONAL CONGRESS 2021
18-21 MAY 2021, MPUMALANGA**

CALL FOR PAPERS

THEME: “CHALLENGES FACING EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS, LABOUR LAW AND SOCIAL PROTECTION TO REDUCE POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN AFRICA, IN THE WAKE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC”

The world of work and employment relations are being reshaped by crucial developments across the globe; globalisation, protectionism, digitization and the Fourth Industrial revolution (4IR), rising unemployment, inequalities and poverty, and the struggle for decent and sustainable work. The COVID-19 pandemic overlaid with other social, economic and political crises has had unprecedented labour market disruptions and devastating impact on people’s lives, an impact unparalleled in modern history.

Workers have suffered job losses as a result of work closures, temporary and remote work, working hour losses and decrease in labour income. This has worsened an already dire situation in Africa enduring faced high levels of poverty. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa the poverty level has been high over a long period, measuring 46% in 1990 and 41% in 2015 (World Bank, 2020; Addae-Korankye,2014). According to ILO data, in the second quarter of 2020 Africa lost an estimated 15.6% of working hours, translating to 60 million jobs, as a result of the pandemic(ILO Monitor, 6th edition, September 2020). It has further exacerbated vulnerable groups particularly the youth. Youth informality rate is the highest in Africa at 93.4% (ILO Monitor, 4th edition, May 2020) and 70.1% of these are in self-employment, reducing their chances to

escape poverty. Relative poverty rates are expected to increase from 21% to 83% as result of COVID pandemic, and social protection coverage for the youth sector is only 17.8%. Women have suffered disproportionately the impact of COVID-19, with women-dominated sectors being hardest hit by the crisis. Some authors have described the pandemic a “virus of inequality” (Oxfam briefing paper, 2021), increasing the divide between rich and poor, employed and unemployed, regressing the gains achieved in racial and gender equality, decent work and other progressive achievements.

In Africa, the pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges of migrant work, declining trade union and employer organisation membership, limited social protection coverage, growing informal economy, gender disparities and pressures on the public sector, particularly frontline workers.

How governments and social actors respond to the labour market challenges is of critical importance, an impetus for solidarity across boundaries for unified, sustainable and innovative solutions.

Against this background, the ILERA African chapter calls for papers to address challenges in the world of work, employment relations, labour law, social protection and (labour) migration from academics, practitioners across disciplines, including governments and social partners across the African continent.

SUB – THEMES AND TRACKS

TRACK 1: COLLECTIVE VOICE AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

In recent times, Africa has witnessed a decline in trade union membership and employer organisation membership, weakening collective action and social dialogue. Governments play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for the promotion of collective voice and social dialogue, through legislation and policy. New challenges like pandemics, climate change, economic downturns, and fiscal strains require new

partnerships with collective actors across society. Strong collective actors and strong social dialogue institutions are critical in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

We therefore solicit papers that debate matters of:

- 1.1 Freedom of association in African countries, worker rights, right to strike, legislation and labour laws
- 1.2 Comparative studies on trade union membership (including e-unionism) and employer organisations membership
- 1.3 Collective bargaining and social dialogue institutional arrangements within the region
- 1.4 Capacity and fit for purpose labour market institutions within the region
- 1.5 How can social dialogue assist in dealing with inequalities, social inclusion, work sustainability, and emerging and new trends in the world of work?
- 1.6 Impact of COVID-19 on inequality (income/ wealth/ gender/racial inequalities)

TRACK 2: WORK, EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND LABOUR LAW IN AFRICA

The effects of globalisation, internationalisation of markets, labour market flexibility and deregulation have dominated research in the last few years. Although these trends continue, Africa, in particular, is affected by an increase in the informal economy and casualization, resulting in diverse working conditions and employment practices across the continent. COVID-19 has further impacted on working conditions, with temporary work closures, loss of labour income and introduction of remote work. As a result of these and other developments, the borderlines of labour law and labour law's interrelationship with other legal and policy areas, notably trade law and immigration law, have also been the subject of constant interrogation.

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted on people's mental health, particularly frontline workers. The psychological effects of the pandemic cannot be underestimated.

We welcome papers that address the changing nature of employment and employment relations in Africa, and the implications for labour law. We would like to solicit contributions that indicate the latest trends:

- 2.1 Comparative studies of the impact of COVID-19 on employment in African countries and labour law's response to COVID-19.
- 2.2 Case studies on industrial conflict, human resource management and skills development in different countries and regions of the continent.
- 2.3 Casualisation, vulnerability, and precarity of work in the formal and informal economies.
- 2.4 The relevance of labour law for gig work and other forms of non-standard employment.
- 2.5 Case studies on impact of COVID-19 on mental health.

TRACK 3: SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES AND SYSTEMS

Labour market disruptions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have forced governments to introduce fiscal stimulus packages and provide social protection relief to households and individuals. These measures vary across high-, medium- and low-income countries. Social grants during lockdown measures have become necessary to meet basic needs of the most vulnerable. Such measures and systems vary across the continent based on fiscal capacity and resources, policy response and implementation. What has been government spending on pandemic-induced social grants in different countries in Africa? Has distribution benefited the most vulnerable groups? What are the various social security policy instruments across the continent? Coverage of informal workers and the poor, particularly during the pandemic, is of particular concern.

We call for papers that address social security and protection systems across the continent, including on the issues raised above, as well as the following:

- 3.1 Conditional and unconditional cash transfers in Africa
- 3.2 Strengthening contributory social security regimes
- 3.3 Social protection for workers in the informal economy and their dependants
- 3.4 Improving social security governance

TRACK 4: MIGRANCY IN AFRICA

The continent has over recent years witnessed increased labour migration, both regular and irregular. Worker rights, working conditions and social protection continue to be a challenge for migrant workers. This is exacerbated by uncontrolled and undocumented flows of labour migrants, resulting also in an unprecedented proliferation in human trafficking, for employment and related purposes. The African Union has introduced instruments to support free movement, open borders and improved treatment of migrant workers.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the unequal treatment of migrant workers, and adversely impacted on their socio-economic conditions, and loss of earning due to closing of borders.

Papers are requested that address the following:

- 4.1 Policy imperatives on strengthening of migrant workers' protection
- 4.2 The better management of labour migration, including addressing inefficient recruitment practices
- 4.3 Root causes of labour migration within and from Africa.
- 4.4 Impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers in Africa
- 4.5 Appropriate responses to climate-induced migration in Africa
- 4.6 Evaluating the role of remittances and diaspora engagement in Africa
- 4.7 Free movement regimes and restrictions on labour market access for migrants
- 4.8 Enhancing protection of refugees and asylum-seekers

TRACK 5: DIGITIZATION OF WORK AND 4IR

Remote work as a result of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures has accelerated the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and made digitization of work a 'new normal' and no longer the 'future of work'. Having to work remotely has drastically changed work processes across sectors, occupations and professions. Technological platforms

like Zoom and Microsoft teams have become the new meeting method with homes and personal space becoming boardrooms.

The impact these new technologies have are dependent on the levels of development of countries in Africa, and their IT infrastructure and capabilities.

We call for papers that will address these issues. In particular we welcome papers that can discern trends regarding the changing nature of work due to new technologies, as well as climate, environmental, political, economic and social changes in society. Analysis of the reasons for the trends will add value to the contributions.

TRACK 6: PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS IN AFRICA

Over the last three decades there have been substantial improvements with public sector employment relations, with an increase in trade unionism, and collective bargaining rights of public service employees. This has resulted in considerable improvement of terms and conditions of work, within the public sector. However in recent years, with the global economic recession and the pandemic, there have been fiscal pressures to reduce the public sector wage bill. This is placing a strain on relationships between governments and public sector unions.

The pandemic has further put frontline health workers and other essential service workers at the forefront of the fight to prevent the spread of an infectious virus. Strikes over working conditions and access to personal protective equipment and clothing, were prevalent. Many frontline workers were infected and lost their lives, the mental health of others has been negatively impacted.

We call for papers that examine the above issues, but also on any other interesting and unique developments in public sector employment relations and law taking place in Africa, including areas of formal and informal alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, such as mediation, conciliation and arbitration amongst African countries.

TRACK 7: GENDER AND WORK

The global increase of female work participation calls for a stronger focus on gender discrimination, equal treatment and work-family policies. The continuing different societal expectations for women and men influence role expectations in the workplace and employee relations in ways that are gendered. In many African contexts these expectations create challenges for women as they struggle with 'inclusion', and thus experience sexual harassment, work-life balance issues and many other exclusions.

Women workers have also suffered disproportionately the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data has shown that sectors like services, travel, retail, food and restaurant, hairdressing, etc. where women are in the majority have adversely suffered. With school closures, day care services where mostly women are employed have been affected negatively.

We therefore welcome papers that address critical questions in women and men's experiences and historical attachments to work. What are the continuities and discontinuities of unequal treatment of women in work? What are the new experiences and conceptions of masculinities emerging as a result of unemployment and precarious work? How do these experiences influence industrial relations and conceptualizations of masculinities and femininities? Case studies of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on women workers are also welcomed.

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 March 2021

Notification of acceptance/rejection: 31 March 2021

Deadline for submission of full papers: 30 April 2021

Submission guidelines for congress abstracts:

1. All abstracts must be submitted by 15 March 2021: abstracts@pscbc.org.za
2. Authors must submit an extended abstract (1000 – 2000 words). Papers not complying with these limits will be desk rejected.
3. Contributors must declare the most appropriate theme of the conference paper.
4. Abstracts must be submitted in English.
5. The abstract should not contain the author's identification information. A separate file should be submitted including the personal and employment details of each author, and a 100 words' biography of each author.
6. Submissions of abstracts should be on letter paper (8.5"x11" or 216x279 mm), with double-space text, and using either Arial or Times New Roman 12pts.
7. Abstracts could be submitted either in MS Word or PDF.

Submission guidelines for congress papers:

1. All full papers must be submitted by no later than 30 April 2021 to: abstracts@pscbc.org.za
2. Full papers must be 5000-8000 words. Papers not complying with these limits will be desk rejected.
3. Contributors must declare the most appropriate congress theme indicated above of the conference paper.
4. Each full paper should be accompanied by an abstract, not to exceed 150 words.
5. Full papers must be submitted in English.
6. Submission of full papers should be on letter paper (8.5"x11" or 216x279 mm), with double-space text, and using either Arial or Times New Roman 12pts.
7. Full papers could be submitted either in MS Word or PDF.