



FDRE Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

COVID-19 Workplace Response Protocol

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

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Introduction

Currently our world is a global Village where information, goods and services are moving one end to the other within a short period of time. Likewise the recently occurred deadly Coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread rapidly to all countries due to the unprecedented regular and irregular migration of peoples for the purpose of tourism, better livelihood, trade and diplomatic objectives. Ethiopia, as a part of Globalized world, the fact is not an exception for it. Hence, from the moment COVID-19 is declared pandemic by World Health Organization and the first confirmed case in our country, prevention and mitigating the health, social and economic impact has become the priority for the Ethiopian Government.

While it is impossible to continue business as usual, it is challenging to propose a uniform solution for all employers due to varying nature of each sector. Thus, the response to those sectors, both from private and government, is different from sector to sector.

The ILO Guideline on how to respond and manage natural and manmade crisis in the workplace outlines the following measures:

- Ensure basic income security, especially for persons whose jobs or livelihoods have been disrupted by the crisis;
- If the crisis persists, include workers in safety net schemes;
- Ensure workers who are impacted by the crisis get basic social services particularly health services;
- Respect for key provisions of International Labour Standards relating to OSH, social security, employment, non-discrimination, working arrangements and protection of vulnerable workers during crisis.

As the situation gets worse across the world, countries are closing their borders for non-essential goods and services provisions. It is unlikely this situation will



go back to normal anytime soon. Thus, it is crucial to mitigate social and economic impact of this crisis.

In addition to the current on going fulltime anti COVID19 engagement of the Government together with action taken by industries and service sectors, it is important to carefully analyze the adverse impact of COVID-19 on the economy and labour relations. Thus, in order to take logical, participatory legal and administrative measures, proactive tripartite consultation and direction should be taken. Based on this call to action, this protocol is released on March 18, 2020 to be implemented by everyone in the workplaces as well as all other relevant stakeholders.

Objective

- To properly protect workplace actors from contracting COVID-19 and to minimize the impact of the pandemic there in.
- To minimize the negative impact of COVID-19 on the national economy, the sustainability of enterprises and on social economic situation and livelihood of the worker.

First step response to mitigate COVID-19 economic impact

Assumptions under which the response becomes effective

- If the spread of the pandemic continues with the current speed
- If basic awareness raising activities and mitigation plan can be implemented effectively in the workplace
- If the pandemic has created negative impact on productivity and export market performance since the last two months

Basic workplace prevention measures

Due to the speed in which COVID-19 spreads and the disaster it brings with it, WHO guidance as well as Ethiopian Government press statements stress the



fact that prevention is one of the best ways to contain the situation. This protocol encourages to implement the following precautions.

1. Precautions to be taken by Employers at work place

- 1.1. Ensure availability of water and sanitary materials
- 1.2. Provide adequately protecting masks with the necessary training how to use them
- 1.3. Establish a taskforce comprised lead by the head of the enterprise to follow-up and monitor COVID-19 prevention and mitigation, with membership of workers' representatives
- 1.4. Identify shop floors where workers are in close contact/proximity and take measures to stop or change the practice
- 1.5. Eliminate congestion in workers' transportation services, take the necessary hygiene precautions and make sure that windows are open during travel
- 1.6. Provide information about COVID-19 safety measures in writing, pictures and audio/video in languages that workers understand
- 1.7. Reduce number of workers using cafeteria at a time to maintain physical distancing, by extending the service time.
- 1.8. Avoid face to face meetings but conduct communication by means of internet/email or telephone.
- 1.9. Put in place a follow up, control and reporting system for COVID-19 response in consultation with trade unions.

2. Precautions to be taken by the Safety Officers/ Safety Committee

- 2.1. Safety officers shall conduct regular observation of entire workstation and facility to follow-up on conditions that may expose workers to COVID-19



- 2.2. Establish A task force headed by the CO of enterprise comprised of worker representatives whose task is to organize, follow up COVID-19 prevention and mitigation.
- 2.3. In the event where a worker/s show symptoms of COVID-19, safety officers in collaboration with enterprise medical staff (if there are any) shall:
 - 2.4. Separate such worker/s; report case/s based on company procedure; and ensure provision of necessary support for the worker/s;
 - 2.5. If a worker/s has been diagnosed with corona virus and has shown the symptoms, identify workers who have been in contact with the infected worker and clean the workplace with the support from Ethiopian Public Health Institute;
 - 2.6. Safety officers shall closely follow up workers who are at high risk of exposure to the virus in the enterprise
 - 2.7. In enterprises where there is shift work, safety officers shall ensure provision of necessary sanitary materials and follow-up on sanitary measures during night shifts.
 - 2.8. Safety officers shall provide up-to-date information about COVID-19

3. Precautions to be taken by workers

- 3.1. Workers shall properly clean their hands with water and soap or sanitizer
- 3.2. Workers shall avoid hand shaking and bodily contact
- 3.3. Workers shall cover their mouth with a disposable tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing
- 3.4. Workers shall avoid sharing personal protective equipment (PPE) with others



- 3.5. Workers who have cough or fever, which are symptoms of COVID-19, shall notify their employer via phone and get medical follow-up from home
- 3.6. Workers shall keep their PPE and clothes clean and use them appropriately
- 3.7. In the event where a worker is confirmed to be COVID-19 positive, other workers should follow all safety precautions given by the employer without creating panic
- 3.8. Cleaning personnel shall properly clean common utilities and materials, taking due care for own safety
- 3.9. Cleaning personnel shall carefully dispose used tissues and sanitary materials while avoiding direct bodily contact

4. Administrative and legal measures to be taken step by step

- 4.1. Whereas crisis handling and responsiveness capacity varies between enterprises and sectors, apart from the solutions emanating from each enterprise, adopting solutions/recommendations proposed by third parties is encouraged
- 4.2. Suspend negotiation of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) for the coming 12 months
- 4.3. Freezing any salary increment decisions for the coming 12 months
- 4.4. Suspend payments of fringe benefits and allowances such as hardship allowance, transport allowance, house allowance, bonuses, and commissions, until the problem gets fully averted
- 4.5. Based on dialogue between employers and trade unions, revise existing salary scales and implement change in order to support survival of enterprises



- 4.6. Allow workers to use their unused annual leaves; and for those who have already fully utilized it, arrange for them to take at least half of their annual leave from upcoming budget year
- 4.7. Provide temporary loan for workers who occupy non-essential functions in the enterprises, and give letter that assures their return when situation gets better;
- 4.8. Employers' and Workers' Organizations operating at different levels should encourage enterprises to fulfill their social responsibilities to the level of their capacity

Conclusion

Our Country currently is in the situation where Covid-19 is taken globally to be a pandemic by WHO and real threat of the world of work nationwide and as result of which the parties at workplace are resorted to fulfill their social obligation in a mutual relationship and exemplary manner leaving aside to comply with what the law strictly provides.

COVID-19 as it stands now is a public health problem where workers are also vulnerable as members of community, the way they perform duties in most cases requires them to work closer to each other , this makes them to be more at risk. Workplace challenges including this are not left for workers and employers alone rather require joint efforts of mitigation. The consequences from such challenges can extend to affect the family and society as well. Therefore, all constituents of the community the work place actors should strictly follow directions given by the government both at workplace and outside among which is that deals with the guiding principles and the social responsibility sprit of each enterprises.

