

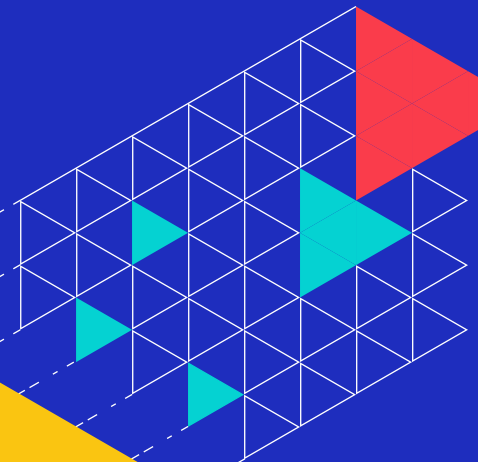
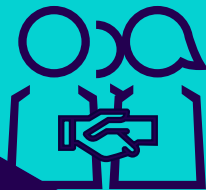
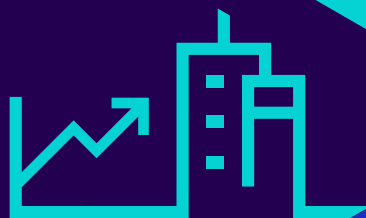


International  
Labour  
Organization

ACT/EMP

## ▶ Leading business in times of Covid crisis

Analysis of the activities of employer  
and business membership organizations  
in the COVID-19 pandemic  
and what comes next



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►► Unprecedented times require unprecedented measures. EBMOs have played a central role in ensuring that these measures are the right ones, and are implemented at the right time and in a way to deliver the right outcomes.

## ► Preface

The COVID-19 crisis has been a seismic shock to the way we live, the way we work and to the way we view the world. Employer and *business membership organizations* (EBMOs) across the globe have been at the forefront of helping the businesses they represent to weather the storm; they have also helped to lead the policy response by working in partnership with national governments to raise awareness, manage immediate risks to health and wellbeing, save businesses and safeguard jobs.

Unprecedented times require unprecedented measures. EBMOs have played a central role in ensuring that these measures are the right ones, and are implemented at the right time and in a way to deliver the right outcomes. In this paper prepared by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), we aim to achieve three goals:

- 1. Take stock** – Provide an updated inventory and analysis of how EBMOs around the world are responding to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis: how are organizations stepping up at this most challenging time, what innovative action has been taken, and what initial lessons can we learn?
- 2. Take a lead** – Look ahead at the role, services and impact of EBMOs as the crisis evolves and we prepare for a post-pandemic reboot: what do EBMOs see as the current and emerging social and economic priorities, how are advocacy strategies reflecting a disrupted public policy landscape?
- 3. Take action** – Identify concrete actions for resilience and social dialogue and for building a platform for recovery: what existing EBMO initiatives can be scaled up to help reboot national economies and labour markets? What pioneering actions can ACT/EMP lead to support EBMOs through the next phase of the crisis and lay the foundations for building back better?

This report is primarily aimed at EBMOs as a thought piece for future action. However, it will also be of interest and relevance for all those interested in the role that the business community acting through its representative organizations can play in driving forward enterprise performance, social progress and vibrant economies. The content of this report is based on practical examples of innovative practices that made a tangible impact during the crisis. Our aim is to learn lessons from how EBMOs around the world have responded to date and to build on innovative models of collaboration and common cause.

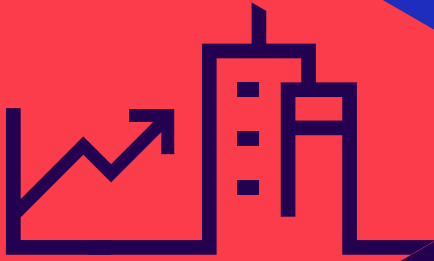
I would like to thank the author of this report, Tom Hadley for his energy and creativity in writing the report. In addition, I would like to thank my colleagues in the Bureau who have all contributed to the report in various ways from the initial concept to compiling the information sources and discussing and reviewing the various drafts. The year has been one of constant change and the challenge was to know when to stop collecting more information and actually produce the report. By the time of publication it could be that the environment has changed again. Nevertheless we believe that the elements for discussion contained in the report will provide food for thought during 2021 and beyond.

**Deborah France Massin**

Director, Bureau for Employers' Activities, ACT/EMP

January 2021

EBMOs around the world  
have stepped up to deliver  
crucial services and amplify  
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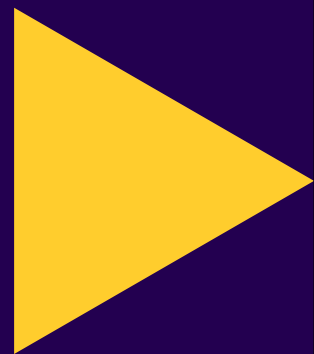


▶ Our goals

**Take stock**

**Take a lead**

**Take action**



## ▶ Executive Summary

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EBMOs around the world have stepped up to deliver crucial services and amplify the business voice amid the sheer enormity of the COVID-19 crisis. With the external environment evolving on a daily basis and millions of jobs, livelihoods and businesses on the line, EBMOs had to reconfigure their support to members and communication channels into government almost overnight.

### Taking stock: EBMOs have responded with resilience, creativity and member-centricity

EBMOs have demonstrated agility, resilience and the ability to innovate. The crisis has acted as a reminder of the crucial convening role that they play and of the business community's contribution to society. EBMOs are essential actors; core elements of the response to date include:

- ▶ **Support for employers** – EBMOs have demonstrated absolute member-centricity at a time of extreme crisis. The priority was clear: provide practical support and provide it fast. This urgency ensured that companies had the information to make business-critical decisions. It also drove the dialogue with governments, which gave birth to the emergency grants and support schemes.
- ▶ **Collective voice to government** – COVID-19 has acted as a reminder of the core role of EBMOs: harnessing collective input to inform policy. Around the world, EBMOs have engaged in bipartite and tripartite agreements and co-created responses to support millions of businesses and jobs.
- ▶ **Analysis, research and thought leadership** – EBMOs are uniquely placed to take the pulse of business and generate 'unique data' at speed. Surveys, research and sector-specific insight have positioned the voice of enterprise at the forefront of COVID-19 debates across the world.
- ▶ **Showcasing the positive role of business** – Employers made a huge contribution during the health emergency. Showcasing practical examples of this and 'dialling up the good' as a means of enhancing the overall reputation of business remains a core mission for EBMOs across the globe.
- ▶ **A new era of collaboration** – Cooperation with workers' organizations, government departments and other stakeholders has been a theme of the crisis. This provides a platform for further change and can herald a new era of collaboration and social dialogue.

### Taking a lead: The role, services and impact of EBMOs will continue to evolve

Disruption can drive innovation and positive change. EBMOs can build on what has been achieved during the crisis and take a lead on emerging policy challenges. The next phase of the pandemic and post-COVID era present unique opportunities for EBMOs to take a lead in the following areas:

- ▶ **Economic and labour market recovery** – As the health crisis morphs into a full-blown economic and employment crisis, EBMOs will play a pivotal role in leading the comeback trail. This will include building the right environment for employers to drive economic growth and create jobs.
- ▶ **Emerging policy challenges** – National governments and international institutions have identified a range of intensifying challenges, including youth employment, equality and inclusion, the informal economy, new working patterns and long-term approaches to worker wellbeing. EBMOs can take a proactive approach in developing new solutions to these emerging challenges.
- ▶ **The future of work** – EBMOs have driven thought-leadership programmes on the future of work for a number of years. Pre-empting evolving business models and new skills needs will be more important than ever for businesses and economies to thrive in the post-pandemic world.
- ▶ **Reputation and risk management** – A fast-changing public policy environment and increased scrutiny of social channels and 24-hour media have increased the need to pre-empt and manage risk. EBMOs can take a lead on this as well as proactive reputation management.

▶▶ EBMOs have demonstrated agility, resilience and the ability to innovate. The crisis has acted as a reminder of the crucial convening role that they play and of the business community's contribution to society.

- ▶ **New services** – What does the next stage of the crisis and the post-pandemic world mean for advocacy voice and member services? In a disrupted economic, social and business landscape, now is the time to innovate and seize new opportunities. This in turn will enhance the relevance of EBMOs to members and non-members who will be more inclined to join the fold.

## Taking action: There are clear short- and longer-term priorities for action for EBMOs

What concrete actions can be taken forward to create positive momentum and change? Initiatives taken forward by EBMOs can be scaled up to drive economic and labour market recovery. The feedback from EBMOs and individual businesses has flagged the following 'action stations':

- ▶ **Maintaining and refreshing support for employers** – The debate on what a post-COVID-19 world will look like is a live one. But we cannot lose sight of this essential point: at the time of writing,<sup>1</sup> we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. Many sectors remain in survival mode; the priority for EBMOs is to help members weather the storm and to push for effective government support.
- ▶ **Re-imagining advocacy and political engagement** – Some EBMOs have flagged latent challenges in engaging with government, but the overall impact of EBMOs during the height of the crisis has highlighted what can be achieved in terms of fast and innovative responses. We need a global debate of what effective engagement with social partners looks like in the post-COVID world.
- ▶ **Unleashing a new push on the reputation of business** – World-class strategic communication will build trust and showcase business as a force for good. The fact that 92 per cent<sup>2</sup> of employees believe that business leaders should speak out on big issues of the day underlines the importance of being at the forefront of pressing social as well as economic debates.
- ▶ **Practical tools are needed to boost EBMO impact** – How can EBMOs influence a burgeoning policy agenda, while also leading proactive campaigns and ramping up member support? And all this with flat or diminishing revenues and limited resources! Harnessing external support and practical tools that enhance capacity and impact is one way forward.

The role of EBMOs will be essential in helping businesses and workers to live with COVID-19 and in informing evolving policy responses. EBMOs will also be at the forefront of building a vision for inclusive post-pandemic economies and labour markets. External support, practical tools and peer-to-peer exchanges will be essential in maximizing this impact. The challenges ahead are huge, but the prize is also significant. The COVID-19 pandemic has decisively demonstrated the contribution that EBMOs make, not only to the businesses they represent, but also to national economies and wider society.

1 The final version of this report was compiled in November 2020.

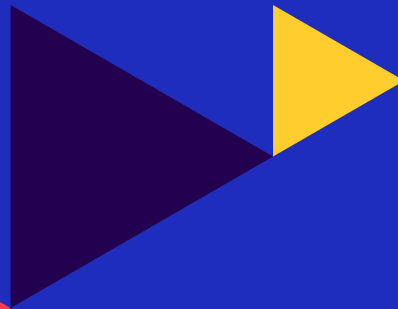
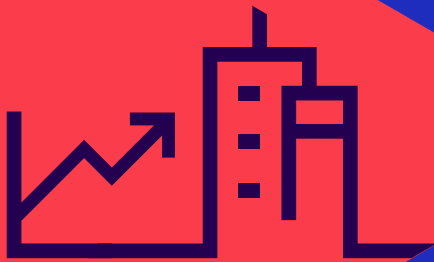
2 Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>



# ▶ Part 1

**Taking stock:  
how have EBMOs  
responded to the crisis?**

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# Part 1

## Taking stock: how have EBMOs responded to the crisis?

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How have EBMOs stepped up at this challenging time and what initial lessons can we learn? Before seeking answers to this question, it is important to first of all recognize the sheer enormity of the COVID-19 challenge. With the external environment evolving on a daily basis and millions of jobs, livelihoods and businesses on the line, EBMOs had to reconfigure their support offering to members and communication channels into government in a matter of hours.

In the words of Phil O'Reilly, Chair of the OECD Board for Business: *'EBMOs have had to deal with questions they have never had to deal with before; they have had to pivot and build new capability fast.'* The aim of this section is to provide inventory and analysis of how EBMOs around the world have responded so far<sup>3</sup> to the COVID-19 crisis. Activities can be split into these five categories:

- 1. Practical support for employers** – How have EBMOs provided the essential support measures at speed and demonstrated 'member-centricity' at a time of crisis?
- 2. Collective voice to government** – A core function of EBMOs is to harness the collective voice and input of business. This role has been super-charged during the COVID-19 crisis and will ensure that EBMOs continue to co-create innovative policy responses to emerging challenges.
- 3. Analysis, research and thought leadership** – Unique data and thought leadership have been crucial during the crisis; this has informed policy and helped members make decisions for their businesses. The insight that only EBMOs can generate will also be crucial in the recovery phase.
- 4. Showcasing the response from business** – Employers have made huge contribution during the health emergency and have put the wellbeing of employees and customers front and centre. Showcasing these examples and 'dialling up the good' remains a core mission for EBMOs.
- 5. Collaboration with stakeholders** – Cooperation with workers' organizations, government and other stakeholders has been a big theme of the crisis. How can EBMOs build on this platform to boost impact and social dialogue? Proactive media engagement has also enabled EBMOs to influence public opinion and the policy agenda.

In all these areas EBMOs have demonstrated agility, resilience and the ability to innovate. Sharing practical examples of this will help organizations and their members emerge stronger and be better prepared for future crises. It also acts as a reminder of the crucial convening role that EBMOs play and of the overall contribution of the business community to society. This was a core message of the International Organization of Employers (IOE) centenary manifesto,<sup>4</sup> which underlines the role of EBMOs in 'shaping labour markets, and providing rapid assistance to their members in confronting crises'.

►► *'The work done by EBMOs in relation to the COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives demonstrates the important role they play.'*

► **International Organization of Employers (IOE) Centenary Manifesto**

<sup>3</sup> This report examines EBMOs' response until Q3 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The IOE Centenary Manifesto was published in June 2020: <https://www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=147675&token=df839c1e8c455306331f0a93923b8b13cdafcec5>

▶▶ From the onset of the crisis, the absolute priority for EBMOs around the world was clear: provide practical support to members and provide it fast.

## ▶ 1. Practical support for members – Member-centricity at a time of crisis

From the onset of the crisis, the absolute priority for EBMOs around the world was clear: provide practical support to members and provide it fast. This sense of urgency ensured that companies were equipped with the up-to-the-minute information they needed to make the right decisions for their survival. It also drove the dialogue with national governments, which gave birth to the emergency grants and schemes that ultimately saved millions of businesses and jobs.

The type of support and information provided by EBMOs can be broken down into three broad categories:

- ▶ **Information from government and other stakeholders** – This has included the updates on the latest rules and guidance from national governments as well as from international organizations like the ILO and the WHO. EBMOs have invested time and effort into making this information clear and understandable for their membership.
- ▶ **Bespoke business support** – As well as acting as a conduit between government and business, EBMOs have mobilized unparalleled levels of bespoke business support, including continuity plans, guidelines for the implementation of health measures and good practice exchanges.
- ▶ **Facilitation of mutual assistance among businesses** – EBMOs have provided platforms enabling companies to share good practices and support each other in the crisis.

In this sub-section, we review the type of practical support provided by EBMOs to the business community. The focus is also on how this support is delivered. Innovative and timely delivery mechanisms will also elevate the work and role of EBMOs through the next phases of the crisis and in the post-pandemic world.

### Guidance and signposting

A common response was to create bespoke COVID-19 'hubs' with updates on the latest government support measures. Amidst the media 'wall of sound' on all COVID-related issues, it was crucial for business to have access to the most relevant and up-to-date information. The crucial role of EBMOs as proactive intermediaries between governments and businesses and as 'curators' of the most pressing and relevant information has been radically reinforced by the COVID-19 crisis.

With new support measures being announced on an almost daily basis during the early days of the crisis, EBMOs were in the front line of fielding a range of urgent technical questions from businesses looking to secure their futures and safeguard jobs. This involved seeking clarity and effective guidance from government departments and acting as a conduit between policy makers and business. The role that EBMOs played in this area not only provided direct benefits for the businesses within their membership; it also benefited government departments who could count on the EBMOs to collate and synthesize the queries of employers.

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► **Case Study 1 – The Japan Business Federation (KEIDANREN, JBF)<sup>5</sup>: Taking the initiative through immediate policy recommendations**

In the first few weeks of the health crisis in Japan, in March 2020, KEIDANREN took the initiative by publishing a series of policy recommendations. These framed the urgent discussions with government on immediate crisis measures, including:

- safeguarding employment and ensuring business continuity;
- digitalization (calls for deregulation reflecting the need for telework and for remote medical treatment);
- solutions for boosting consumer confidence and protecting the economy;
- revitalizing local economies and specific support for SMEs;
- investing in a longer-term vision for a post-pandemic society ("Society 5.0<sup>6</sup>).

KEIDANREN was also proactive in using member questionnaires to gauge how businesses were responding to the crisis and in circulating latest government guidelines on preventing workplace infections, as well as information on paid leave for diverse forms of working arrangements and on a newly established subsidy for enterprises allowing parents unable to work due to childcare needs to take days off.

► **Case Study 2 – BUSA: Cascading information and informing policy priorities in South Africa**

From the outset of the crisis, BUSA worked closely with the National Department of Health to disseminate key messaging and factual information on the virus to their members, which was then circulated to employees via posters and other communication channels. This illustrates the pivotal role that EBMOs can play in cascading crucial information down through its membership base.

Practical tools for members have included a member hotline, return-to-work guidelines and support on implementing business continuity plans through bespoke video content. As well as circulating latest updates and hosting COVID-19 information on its [website](#)<sup>7</sup>, BUSA has played a proactive role in interpreting regulatory changes and submitting its own proposals to government.

BUSA identified four critical work streams, including health, economic impact, labour and communication. Specific policy proposals have included calls to set up a Solidarity Fund based on the WHO model, amend the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) Act to cover workers' wages, and immediate tax and loan relief for employers, particularly for SMEs.

5 Information on the work of Keidanren in Japan is at: <https://www.keidanren.or.jp/en/profile/pro001.html>

6 This refers to a 'human-centered society that balances economic advancement with the resolution of social problems by a system that highly integrates cyberspace and physical space'. 'Society 5.0' was proposed in the 5th Science and Technology Basic Plan as a future society that Japan should aspire to: [https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5\\_0/index.html](https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/society5_0/index.html)

7 The BUSA website can be accessed at: <https://www.businessforsa.org>

## Worker safety and managing remote working

The safety and health of staff was the priority for businesses from the outset of the national lockdowns. Support on how to communicate with staff and manage workforce issues at a time of crisis was a big theme of initial COVID-related services delivered by EBMOs. A further area of practical support was around managing remote working, including initial set-up and good practice guidance on the ongoing management of a remote workforce.

Pre-COVID, employee wellbeing and flexible working patterns were already highly topical agendas in many countries. The crisis has intensified the focus on both of these areas. Providing practical support to employers has been crucial; as part of this, guidance documents and tools that EBMOs can use and tailor for their members have played a pivotal role. An example of this is the ACT/EMP guide on working from home<sup>8</sup> and the accompanying video,<sup>9</sup> which have been tailored by EBMOs in a range of countries, including Montenegro, North Macedonia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Seychelles, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania and Uganda.

Based on the insight from EBMOs around the world, there are two conclusions that can be drawn:

- The focus on occupational safety and health and worker wellbeing will continue to be a priority through the next phases of the crisis. It is also an area where the business community can take a lead in the post-pandemic era. As well as managing the initial lockdown period in the best way possible, companies recognized the importance of managing furloughed<sup>10</sup> workers and those working remotely with empathy and in a way that recognizes individual circumstances. EBMOs can be a catalyst for driving ongoing progress in this area by ensuring that their members have access to wellbeing experts and examples of good practice.
- Flexible working patterns can be implemented at scale and benefits workers, as well as employers. More remote and flexible working (including 'hybrid' models mixing office-based and remote work) is therefore likely to be one of the legacies of the crisis. EBMOs can play an important role in ensuring that new working patterns are sustainable over time, by providing practical support to their members on areas such as managing the OHS implications of remote working and adapting performance management practices (moving away from 'hours spent' to 'work accomplished'). This will also feed into the broader debates around productivity and evolving leadership and management skills.

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▀▀ *'Despite this difficulty situation, businesses have been driven by a sense of civic duty and overwhelmingly decided not to lay employees off, but to adapt, adjust and show their ability to be agile.'*

► Célestin Tawamba, President of GICAM (Inter-employer Group of Cameroon)

8 The ACT/EMP guide can be accessed at the following link: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/--act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_745024.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/--act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_745024.pdf)

9 The ACT/EMP 'Working from Home' video can be accessed here: [https://www.youtube.com/embed/05n62gQurnU?hl=EN&rel=0&showinfo=0&autoplay=1&fs=0&autoplay=1&color=white&cc\\_load\\_policy=1&iv\\_load\\_policy=3&cc\\_lang\\_pref=en](https://www.youtube.com/embed/05n62gQurnU?hl=EN&rel=0&showinfo=0&autoplay=1&fs=0&autoplay=1&color=white&cc_load_policy=1&iv_load_policy=3&cc_lang_pref=en)

10 This refers to employees placed on temporary leave, with wages paid at least in part by government.

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► **Case Study 3 – ANDI: Driving the #UnidosSomosMásPaís<sup>11</sup> initiative in Colombia**

The twin goals for the National Association of Colombia Entrepreneurs (ANDI) have been worker safety and economic recovery. Specific activities over the course of the crisis have highlighted the role that EBMOs can play in galvanizing collective action, driving innovation and building collaborative engagement with government, academic institutions and other stakeholders, including the Pan American Health Organization. The following are three illustrations of this pioneering and convening role:

- **Building connections** – The #UnidosSomosMásPaís ('United We Are More') initiative created a virtual marketplace to match supply and demand for services and products and help large buyers connect with local producers, independent professionals and entrepreneurs. The aim is also to create new opportunities for hundreds of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises who register on the platform.
- **Providing support to business and workers** – At the outset of the crisis, ANDI worked with the government to protect the 7.6 million jobs generated through SMEs in Colombia by ensuring measures were in place to help them meet payroll obligations. Other activities included a virtual hub for information on regional and national responses to COVID-19, focusing on areas such as remote working, protective equipment, transport, and work organization (eg shift patterns). The support offering also included a foreign trade bulletin with regular updates for ANDI members on developments in other countries that could impact on overseas trade.
- **Driving innovation and collective action** – ANDI has been at the forefront of harnessing the input of volunteers from over 20 academic institutions – as well as funding from the business community – to manufacture and distribute crucial medical devices such as ventilators. This mobilization led to direct support to 337 intensive care units across 10 municipalities. A further innovative outcome has been the manufacturing of 'Aerosol Box' cabins – acrylic chambers that isolate the patient during endotracheal intubation, preventing the dispersion of particles that may contaminate medical personnel. The aim has been to produce 5,000 of these cabins.

## Managing the return to the workplace

The priority in all countries has been to manage the gradual re-opening of national economies and the return to workplaces in a way that minimizes health risks and takes on board the concerns of workers and consumers. EBMOs have been at the forefront of helping businesses manage this process, through targeted (and often sector-specific) guidance and by facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges of good practice. EBMOs have also played a lead role by working with policy makers, workers' organizations, and health and safety experts.

Some of the specific areas where effective support has made a tangible difference in facilitating the safe return to workplaces across the world include:

- interpreting latest government guidance on re-opening timescales and parameters (and seeking clarifications when needed);
- practical support to enterprises on conducting safety assessments, including access to health and safety and employee wellbeing experts;

<sup>11</sup> Information on the ANDI initiative in Columbia can be accessed here: <http://www.andi.com.co/Home/Evento/47-unidos-somos-mas-pais>

▶▶ The priority in all countries has been to manage the gradual re-opening of national economies and the return to workplaces in a way that minimizes health risks and takes on board the concerns of workers and consumers.

- ▶ internal communication strategies – peer-to-peer exchanges not only helped businesses to develop the right policies but also the right tone when engaging and communicating with staff;
- ▶ external communication strategies – finding the right tone was equally key to external messaging; in the midst of a global pandemic, business cannot be seen to prioritize re-opening of the economy to the detriment of public health. EBMOs and peer-to-peer networks played a central role in pre-empting reputational risks and finding the right balance.

Virtually all EBMOs provided guidance on COVID-19 Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) at the workplace, either developed on their own or through links to guidance provided by other institutions. Having access to support and guidance that could be customized to the needs of member businesses in a specific country has been invaluable. A good illustration of this is the ACT/EMP Safe Return to Work<sup>12</sup> guide that EBMOs in countries like Georgia, Moldova, Barbados, Costa Rica and Dominican Republic customized and 'localized' for their members.

▶▶ *'We have all learned the need to strengthen national health systems, to have self-sufficiency and access to personal protective equipment.'*

- ▶ **Rosa Santos**, Director of the Labour Relations Department, Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations

▶▶ *'We have learned lessons from other countries – for example with regards to phasing out of lockdown. We are circulating these lessons to our members so that they can plan accordingly.'*

- ▶ **Farooq Ahmed**, Secretary-General of the Bangladesh Employers' Federation

It is important to not lose sight of the urgency and sheer volume of questions and challenges for businesses looking to ensure that workplaces were made as safe as possible. There was no shortage

<sup>12</sup> The ACT/EMP Return to Work Guide can be accessed at the following link: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_744033.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_744033.pdf)

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of information and news – including from national media and government sources – on the pandemic. What was crucial for employers was to access a trusted source that could synthesize, authenticate and interpret the waves of new information. This is the role – that of trusted advisor – that EBMOs around the world have played during the COVID-19 crisis.

► **A question of trust! Examples of most common queries to EBMOs...**

What kind of questions and challenges, linked to OSH issues, have EBMOs helped their members to address? Based on the anecdotal feedback from EBMOs, the most common clusters of questions raised by employers across the globe have included:

1. What is best practice in terms of managing the return to workplaces, including physical alterations (eg protective shields) and safe distancing 'markers'?
2. What PPE is and will be needed? How can I check the quality? Where can I source it from?
3. Can I get COVID-19 tests for my employees? What do I do if a worker starts exhibiting symptoms?
4. Do I need to create new internal roles to manage the return to the workplace? What other immediate workforce and HR challenges do I need to factor in?
5. Some workers may feel the need to come into work in order to earn full pay even if they (or family members) have symptoms. How can I ensure that this doesn't happen?
6. How can we address employee concerns over public transport? What is best practice in terms of staggering the return to workplaces?
7. How can I best manage the re-integration of furloughed workers? How can I manage redundancies? What job-search support can I offer and signpost to those affected?

► **Case Study 4 – Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)<sup>13</sup>:  
Guidance on COVID-19 OSH at the workplace**

EK developed a comprehensive and practical guide on COVID-19 OSH in the workplace, covering three core areas for employers, workers and consumers:

- **Safe work** – This covers key areas such as identifying signs of infection before staff enter the workplace, physical distancing between employees, maintaining hygiene in business premises, personal protective equipment (PPE), practical guidance on travelling abroad and procedures to follow in cases of suspected coronavirus infection in the workplace.
- **Safe services** – This section provides good practices in identifying those who may be infected before they use services, reducing contact between people, developing clear instructions to customers on physical distancing, maintaining a high level of hygiene in premises and making safety measures visible.
- **Safe transport** – This section covers an overview of transport-related challenges, steps for ensuring safe physical distancing, reducing interaction between drivers and passengers, enhanced cleaning and clear communication of safety measures to all passengers.

13 Information on the work of the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) can be accessed at: <https://ek.fi/en/about-us/>



### ► Case Study 5 – FEDIL<sup>14</sup>: OSH Support for manufacturers in Luxembourg

In order to be able to support its member companies in the manufacturing industry sector, The Fédération des Industriels Luxembourgeois (FEDIL), together with the STI (Service de Santé au Travail de l'Industrie), drew up a good practice guide specifically targeted at employers in the manufacturing sector. This guide was regularly updated to reflect decisions of the public authorities, and included a focus on the following priority concerns from member businesses:

- **PPE** – The guide provides signposting to internet platforms for matching supply and demand for PPE, including protective masks, visors, protective plastic screens, aprons and disinfectants.
- **Organization in the workplace** – Focusing on teleworking, physical distancing, staggering of shifts and breaks, protocols for non-sharing of tools, workplace 'flows'.
- **Training and awareness-raising** – Guidance on raising awareness across production sites through team leaders and department managers and ensuring clear contact points and accountabilities (eg how to flag difficulties in applying agreed measures so that adjustments can be made).
- **Pre-emptive measures** – The aim is to raise awareness of transmission routes, recognizing symptoms and understanding which workers (and family members) are 'at risk' and vulnerable.

## Harnessing digital channels

In addition to the substance of what has been delivered by EBMOs during the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to reflect on the form. Increasing the use of digital channels to deliver services and information was a priority for many EBMOs pre-pandemic; there is no doubt that the crisis has radically accelerated this process. In the words of the Greek philosopher Plato, 'necessity is the mother of invention'; there has certainly been no shortage of innovation and new approaches throughout the pandemic. But, with the digital revolution already under way pre-crisis within most EBMOs, it is apt to paraphrase with the following: 'necessity is the mother of (rapid) implementation'!



**80 per cent of EBMOs across the world have renovated and adapted their service delivery<sup>15</sup>**

Eighty per cent of EBMOs across the world have renovated and adapted their service delivery, according to the survey conducted by ILO-ACT/EMP and IOE.<sup>16</sup> The majority are offering virtual advisory, legal and consulting services (83 per cent), with over 50 per cent moving their training offer to an online platform. What are some of the other ways EBMOs have harnessed digital channels during the pandemic? Specific examples include virtual meetings (with members but also third parties), member engagement and data collection, remote working, 'open' webinars (to discuss COVID-19-related issues with members as well as non-members), video briefings and podcasts. Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx and

<sup>14</sup> Information on FEDIL can be accessed at: <https://www.fedil.lu/en/>

<sup>15</sup> Survey conducted by ACT/EMP and IOE in May–June 2020. Information can be accessed at: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS\\_749490/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS_749490/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>16</sup> The full survey can be accessed at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_749379.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_749379.pdf)

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customized online training have become embedded as crucial channels for delivering information and guidance and for driving member engagement.

The digital shift has also led to other changes that EBMOs have harnessed in the crisis and can build on in the short and longer term. In particular, it has underlined the importance of the digital and technology sector within national economies. This was a significant growth sector pre-crisis, and the crisis provided another opportunity for EBMOs to reach out to companies (including new start-ups) and associations from the IT and technology sector as part of membership acquisition strategies. This has been apparent in many countries for some time. A recent example of this trend can be found in Bulgaria, where the national federation BIA recently reported not only the acquisition of individual IT companies as members but also brought a specialist association within membership – the Professional Association of Robotics and Automation.

The digital step-change brought about by the crisis has a further specific implication for EBMOs: the need for a telecommunications infrastructure to support it. This is already a campaigning ‘ask’ in many countries, and EBMOs will be at the forefront of ensuring that countries have the necessary bandwidth and investment in physical infrastructure, such as antennas, for the business community and wider society to thrive in the 21st century. This is not a new debate, but the pandemic and the resultant surge in remote working has radically increased its urgency.

► **Case Study 6 – VNO-NCW: Development of a ‘Corona Calculator’<sup>17</sup> in the Netherlands**

The Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCM) developed a web-based ‘Corona Calculator’ to help companies of all sizes and from a wide range of sectors navigate the COVID-19 crisis. The web-based tool enables employers and entrepreneurs to quickly gain insight into which schemes apply to them and get an indication of allowances, credit options and tax deferrals available. It also enables employers to check the liquidity position of the company in the coming period.


This insight into the financial future of an organization is presented in three simple steps, with business registration number and/or enterprise name used to ensure that businesses can quickly identify what support they are entitled to. As well as focusing on the measures offered by government, the tool also highlights support measures being offered by financial institutions.

This response to the crisis reflects the overall VNO-NCW mission of helping the business environment and boosting the competitiveness of Dutch industry (even in extreme and difficult times).

<sup>17</sup> The Corona Calculator can be accessed at: <https://www.coronacalculator.nl/>

## ▶ 2. Collective voice to government

The COVID-19 crisis has acted as a reminder of one of the core functions and roles of EBMOs – harnessing the collective voice and input of business to inform policy developments. Around the world, EBMOs have worked with governments to co-create policy responses to evolving pandemic-related challenges. This has also involved bipartite and tripartite agreements as well as partnerships with other business organizations, NGOs, research institutes and trade unions. The majority of EBMOs have conducted enterprise surveys to assess the impact of COVID-19, which have been used as the evidence base for policy advocacy and for shaping support measures for business.

 **94 per cent of EBMOs have increased their advocacy activities during the crisis, despite having to strip back to their financial and human capacity.<sup>18</sup>**

A survey of 127 EBMOs conducted by ILO-ACT/EMP and the IOE shows that – despite having to strip back to their financial and human capacity – an overwhelming share of EBMOs (94 per cent) have leveraged available resources to increase their advocacy activities during the crisis. This has involved a multi-layered advocacy effort with governments, as well as increased press coverage and increased presence on social media. Importantly, these efforts in the assessment of EBMOs have largely proven to be effective or very effective.

 *‘As with the spread of the disease, decision-making must be twice as fast.’*

▶ **Gisèle Ranampy**, Minister of Labour Employment, Public Services and Social Legislation, Madagascar

### Informing policy responses at every stage

Some EBMOs have flagged latent challenges in engaging with national governments at the right time. But, in many countries EBMOs have been at the forefront of informing national government responses across the different stages of the COVID-19 crisis: the initial ‘survival’ phase, the stabilization phase and the recovery phase. Showcasing the benefits of this positive engagement with the business community will help to ensure that this becomes the norm in subsequent phases of the crisis and in the post-pandemic world.

Practical examples of how and where input from EBMOs is being provided at each of the different stages of the crisis are:

#### Survival stage

- ▶ At the very onset of the crisis, EBMOs around the world worked closely with government and other social partners to urgently co-create policy responses that would ultimately avert the immediate risk of thousands of business closures and millions of job losses.

<sup>18</sup> ACT/EMP and IOE survey conducted in May–June 2020. More information can be accessed at: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS\\_749490/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS_749490/lang--en/index.htm)

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- Specific examples of this 'early intervention' and of EBMOs injecting a real sense of urgency through their discussions with government are flagged in a number of the case studies that follow. These include a big focus on cash flow (Kenya), feeding into emergency tripartite discussions (Trinidad and Tobago) and using survey data to create clear calls to action (India). The use of bespoke data to measure initial impact on employers is also captured in the regional case study of EBMOs across Europe.
- EBMOs around the world were able to inform response measures such as wage subsidies, job retention schemes, short-time work schemes, extending social protection and statutory sick pay, business grants, debt deferrals and tax relief.
- EBMOs were called on to provide specific sectoral insight – particularly with regards to some of the hardest hit sectors such as non-food retail, creative industries, tourism, hospitality and leisure. A pivotal element of this phase was ensuring that support measures covered different categories of businesses and workers, including the self-employed and those working in temporary and contract roles.
- In some countries, an immediate and highly necessary priority during this phase was to adapt current employment regulations to facilitate widespread teleworking. Without this, the impact of the pandemic on productivity and on business sustainability would have been even more extreme.

### **Stabilization stage**

- During this stabilization and adjustment phase, EBMOs were at the forefront of ensuring a safe return to workplaces, with a specific focus on occupational safety and health (OSH) at work. This involved tripartite dialogue and active engagement with member businesses, policy makers and OSH specialists.
- The sector-specific focus that EBMOs can provide was again crucial; this ensured that government policy reflected bespoke challenges in key sectors and that the guidance provided by EBMOs to employers was as bespoke as possible. For example, the return-to-work challenges varied significantly according to the types of role and the physical configuration of different workplaces.
- Other EBMO activities during this phase included feeding into the debate around short-term infrastructure needs and reskilling (including facilitating transitions into higher-demand sectors).
- Addressing the financial needs of businesses remained a priority during this phase. Most Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) had insufficient liquidity to maintain operations beyond a 15-day time period according to the [OECD's analysis of SME responses<sup>19</sup>](#) to the crisis. This underlines the pivotal role of EBMOs in pushing for business continuity measures to be implemented effectively and extended as the health crisis persists.
- As well as informing government support measures, EBMOs have acted as hubs for signposting member businesses to the latest guidance and evolving support packages.

### **Recovery stage**

- EBMOs have built on relationships nurtured with government departments during the course of the pandemic to help build a platform for rebooting national economies and jobs markets. While continuing to deal with evolving health measures and mitigating the impact of national and localized lockdowns, EBMOs will be at the forefront of informing policies for driving future recovery.
- Specific areas of interest for EBMOs have included promoting investment and international trade (including effective export credit insurance schemes), labour market flexibility that works for employers and workers, feeding into education and skills policy, making the case for investment in R&D and technical skills, and boosting job-creation.

19 The OECD report on SME responses to the crisis can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>

- ▶ Other 'big ticket' items in the post-pandemic era will include productivity, business resilience and laying the foundations of the energy transition towards a net-zero carbon economy. EBMOs can take a lead on these and others priority issues that will gain momentum, such as promoting the reconstruction of the productive capacity while supporting the transition of informal economic units and workers to the formal economy and making change happen on equality and inclusion.

### ▶ Case Study 7 – ECA<sup>20</sup>: Making proactive recommendations to government in Trinidad and Tobago

The Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ECA) participated in the National Tripartite Advisory Council (NTAC) discussions on developing national guidelines aimed at preparing workplaces in Trinidad and Tobago for COVID-19. Several ECA recommendations were included in the final NTAC submission to government. ECA has also conducted awareness-raising and training activities for its member companies on a range of issues, including:

- ▶ updates on the national, regional and international situation;
- ▶ COVID-19 issues in the workplace and employer responses, including leave and travel policies;
- ▶ OSH considerations, including preventative measures in the workplace;
- ▶ support to help employers with their business continuity planning;
- ▶ work-from-home policy templates for its member companies.

An important component to the ECA's approach has been a proactive media strategy, resulting in press interviews to raise awareness of the impact of COVID-19 on the workplace and the appropriate responses of employers.

## Providing specific sectoral analysis

One of the many lessons of the COVID-19 crisis has been the need to develop specific approaches and support measures that are bespoke to specific sectors. This is where the 'convening' role of EBMOs has come to the fore; as well as ensuring a strong collective voice for the business community as a whole, they have ensured a strong representative voice to government on behalf of companies operating in the hardest hit sectors.



**Over 50 per cent of EBMOs have sectoral associations as members. This sector-specific voice and insight has been crucial during the crisis.<sup>21</sup>**

The recent ACT/EMP and IOE survey flagged that over half of EBMOs have both companies and sectoral associations as members. Just under a third – 32 per cent – of EBMOs have *only* federations or associations in their membership. When considering the impact that EBMOs have made to policy developments during the course of the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to recognize the importance of this

<sup>20</sup> Information on the work of the The Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ECA) can be accessed here: <https://www.ecatt.org>

<sup>21</sup> ACT/EMP and IOE survey. More information is at: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS\\_749490/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/news/WCMS_749490/lang--en/index.htm)

sector-specific insight. As well as informing initial policy responses to the crisis (particularly in the hardest hit industries such as hospitality, non-food retail, transport and tourism), this sector-specific insight will be key to rebuilding national economies and labour markets during the recovery phase.

Looking ahead, one of the priorities for EBMOs will be to develop a comprehensive risk management framework made up of (a) prevention/mitigation; (b) preparation for response; (c) advance recovery; (d) response; and (e) recovery.<sup>22</sup> This will include a focus on potential scenarios and the evolving external landscape in specific sectors – especially sectors where we can expect intense scrutiny from policy makers, media and the wider public. Moreover, EBMOs can also support their members in developing enterprise risk management strategies using an integrated approach to address the following risks, which are likely to play a prominent role in the post-COVID-19 world.<sup>23</sup>

► Enterprise risk management				
Market risk	Credit risk	Pricing risk	Asset-liability risk	Technology risk
Human resources risk	Disaster risk	Strategy risk	Competitor risk	Regulatory risk

## Balancing health and the economy

Throughout the crisis, one of the biggest challenges facing national governments has been balancing the health of the economy with the physical health of the population. Widespread lockdowns have had a massive impact on businesses, workers and national economies. The feedback from some EBMOs is that – while they were involved in the design and execution of COVID-19 support measures – there was little input into the initial decisions to lockdown in the first place.

This has been equated by some – including EBMOs in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Africa, who form part of the [Dutch Employers' Cooperation Programme \(DECP\)](#)<sup>24</sup> – as playing a role in 'stopping the bleeding', but only after the 'economic wound' was inflicted in the first place. The argument that there is a human cost of locking down and to not being able to work is one that was made in some countries. A good example of this was Malawi, where the Court of Justice prevented a lockdown on the basis that such a measure would be a violation of human rights: people have to be able to earn a living, and a lockdown could genuinely create a famine across the country.

This is a difficult and sensitive area for EBMOs and the wider business community. On the one hand, making the case for economic growth and fighting the case for business is all part of the remit. At the same time, there is some longer-term reputational risk associated with being perceived as downplaying the health risks of COVID-19. In the main, the business community has struck a balance: highlighting the economic and employment benefits of re-opening parts of the economy where possible, while putting the health and wellbeing of employees, customers, and the wider population front and centre.

22 Leonard, H.B. & Giles, D. (2009). *Managing crises: Responses to large-scale emergencies*. CQ Press.

Leonard, H.B. & Howitt, A.M. (2009). Acting in time against disasters: A comprehensive risk management framework. In: Kunreuther, H. & Useem, M. (eds), *Learning from catastrophes: Strategies for reaction and response*. Pearson Prentice Hall.

23 Lam, J. (2017). *Implementing enterprise risk management: From methods to applications*. John Wiley & Sons.

24 More information on the work of the [Dutch Employers' Cooperation Programme \(DECP\)](#) can be accessed here: <https://www.decp.nl>

In many countries, governments have used the input of independent teams of scientists to deliver public briefings and inform policy decisions. However, we haven't really seen an economic equivalent of this – ie independent teams of economists providing regular impartial analysis and dashboards for the COVID discussions that includes the impact on employment and on business. This is an argument made in a number of countries; for example, it was at the heart of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Director General Carolyn Fairbairn's message that 'we cannot wait until COVID-19 is defeated to set out a vision for compassionate growth'.<sup>25</sup>

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►► *'Preserving citizens' health must be solved in parallel to sustaining the economy. In order to protect health and lives, we must save the economy.'*

► **Predrag Mitrovic**, President of the Montenegro Employers Federation

## What's next?

The nature of the current crisis means that there isn't a clean demarcation between the different phases and there is a long way to go before the pandemic can be talked about in the past tense. Nothing can be taken for granted. The input and voice of the business community will be more important than ever as we learn to deal with localized lockdown and new increases in infection rates. While there is an understandable desire to start moving forward and to focus on a post-COVID world, the health crisis is very much still live. The challenge for policy makers and for businesses is to continue dealing with immediate safety priorities while plotting a route for longer-term economic and jobs market recovery.

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►► [...] the health crisis is very much still live. The challenge for policy makers and for businesses is to continue dealing with immediate safety priorities while plotting a route for longer-term economic and jobs market recovery.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the argument for compassionate growth was made in the following article: <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/markets/article-8885453/Outgoing-CBI-boss-tells-PM-save-economy-Covid.html>

► EBMOs have stepped up during the crisis, and one of the big factors has been the ability to generate timely research and data.

### ► 3. Analysis, research and thought leadership

EBMOs have stepped up during the crisis, and one of the big factors has been the ability to generate timely research and data. Business surveys, bespoke research and sector-specific insight have helped to position the voice of business and enterprise at the forefront of many of the COVID-19 debates across the world.

#### Making an impact through ‘unique data’

How has research and data helped EBMOs to make an impact during the crisis? The ability to survey members at short notice first and foremost enabled EBMOs to get a clear idea of the situation member enterprises were facing and to prioritize key asks to government and support provisions. This data- and evidence-led approach also underpinned the persuasiveness of EBMO advocacy activities from the very beginning of the crisis. Practical data-gathering tools – including those provided by ACT/EMP – have enabled EBMOs to not only generate timely research but also to present it in a way that ensures maximum impact. The subsequent case studies provide a snapshot of what data was generated and to what end.

As post-lockdown employment challenges come to the fore in most countries, timely economic and labour market data is crucial. Policy decisions cannot be made on stats that were collected months ago! The global employment services sector and the wider business community have a huge role to play by providing policy makers with speedy data and insight from the front line of the labour market. Sector-specific intelligence will be especially important in helping policy makers make decisions on the need for ongoing support in specific industries. An example of this is the rapid assessment work undertaken across four Western Balkan countries<sup>26</sup> which highlighted the impact on businesses and jobs as well as solutions for resuming operations.

#### Thought leadership

A clear example of EBMOs taking a leadership role on specific COVID-19 developments was linked to the fast and drastic change to working patterns. As well as informing members through good practice guidance on managing a remote workforce and investing in digital infrastructure, EBMOs were at the forefront of ensuring that the right regulatory responses were implemented. Employer organizations around the world have taken a variety of messages forward, including the need to facilitate teleworking options and the potential implications for productivity. Managing the return-to-work process has also been an area where EBMOs have stepped up their thought leadership credentials in a way that has benefited member businesses, workers and policy makers.

<sup>26</sup> Details on this assessment work in the West Balkans can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS\\_754190/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/budapest/whats-new/WCMS_754190/lang--en/index.htm)



### ▶ Case Study 8 – EBMOs in Europe making use of bespoke research and data

Below are practical examples of how EBMOs in Europe use data to take stock of an evolving situation and to underpin key asks to national governments:

- ▶ **NHO (Norway):** The NHO regularly conducted membership surveys related to COVID-19, for example on the impact of the crisis on companies (eg need for layoffs); on the effectiveness of government support measures for companies; or on challenges faced by companies in international trade.
- ▶ **EK (Finland):** The EK has regularly undertaken surveys among employers, including a specific survey on the effects of the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions.
- ▶ **MEF (Montenegro):** Rapid assessment activities undertaken by the Montenegrin Employers Federation was instrumental in revealing the specific impact of COVID-19 on businesses.
- ▶ **MAI (Israel):** The MAI has regularly conducted enterprise surveys, including ones aimed at estimating the impact of proposed new government financial support for employee retention.
- ▶ **FEU (Ukraine):** Work to evaluate the practical impact on business also fed into the federation's commitment to working collaboratively with trade unions and government.
- ▶ **CBI (UK):** The CBI has set up a dedicated COVID-19 inbox which enables companies to inform the CBI how the COVID-19 outbreak is impacting on their business, to share thoughts and experiences, and make suggestions for government action.
- ▶ **SPCR (Czech Republic):** The SPCR has regularly made surveys among its members, including among particular groups of enterprises, eg a survey about the impact of COVID-19 on exporting companies.
- ▶ **VOSZ (Hungary):** The VOSZ surveys have included a specific sectoral focus, including analysis on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the digital economy.

### ▶ Case Study 9 – FKE<sup>27</sup>: Using data to underline the cash-flow impact on employers in Kenya

A wide-ranging survey<sup>28</sup> conducted by The Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) across its membership proved crucial to better understanding how businesses can emerge from the pandemic and the type of support required from government. Core messages and findings were as follows:

- ▶ Cash flow was the most urgent concern for 84 per cent of businesses, with 75 per cent also flagging the impact on supply chains. Overall, 70 per cent felt that the government has not done enough to help.
- ▶ Specific solutions identified included reducing corporate taxes, setting up a 'Wage Support Fund', accelerating the opening-up of more trading markets and lifting the ban on night transportation, especially for cargo.

27 Information on the work of The Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) can be accessed here: <http://www.fke-kenya.org/site/index.php>

28 Details on the FKE survey can be accessed at: <http://www.fke-kenya.org/site/index.php/news-and-media/press-releases#>

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- A further practical proposal was for the Central Bank to work with commercial banks to develop a framework for loan repayments and credit facilities linked to cash-flow projections.
- Only 10 per cent of respondents had been able to make arrangements for staff to work from home. Remote working guidance for employers and better technology infrastructure are two of the ways forward here.

The research conducted by the FKE also highlights the impact on jobs, including the specific finding that COVID-19 wiped out 8.3 per cent of employment in the formal private sector between March and July 2020, amounting to over 170,000 jobs being lost. Only 30 per cent of responding companies had enough resources to meet wage obligations in the next six months, underlining the crucial importance of government support to help enterprises and safeguard a million private sector jobs. Greater collaborative work between social partners to stabilize the work environment and maintain competitive labour costs is a further FKE recommendation for mitigating the impact of the crisis.

► **Case Study 10 – SCCI: Recovery and prosperity plan<sup>29</sup> for the Seychelles**

The *Seychelles* Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) used various sources of data and bespoke research to inform immediate calls to action as well as a longer-term vision for the country's economy and business landscape. The Recovery and Prosperity Plan starts with the recognition that '*COVID-19 has changed our businesses and society in ways we never saw coming, but the one thing that isn't changing is the value of people.*' Putting people first is at the heart of the plans for recovery.

In order to develop a relevant, valid and achievable recovery strategy, the SCCI reached out to its members to obtain information on the latest challenges and successes. Specific data sets that informed the plan included latest international indicators, quantification of the impact of COVID-19 on businesses and a qualitative study on what measures would have the most impact in terms of empowering the Seychelles business community going forward.

The feedback and insight from members enabled the SCCI to present plans and solutions around support for wages, for safeguarding jobs and for ensuring loans for employers. The crisis has provided a good example of an EBMO and tripartite arrangements helping a country to move forward.

29 The SCCI Recovery and Prosperity Plan can be accessed here: <http://www.employment.gov.sc/media-centre/publications/item/330-scci-proposes-recovery-and-prosperity-plan>

▶▶ Individual businesses have made huge contributions during the health emergency and have put the safety and wellbeing of employees and customers front and centre.

## ▶ 4. Galvanizing and showcasing the response from business

Individual businesses have made huge contributions during the health emergency and have put the safety and wellbeing of employees and customers front and centre. Showcasing these examples and 'dialling up the good' in a way that impacts positively on the overall reputation of business remains a core mission for EBMOs across the globe.

### Telling good stories

As well as generating robust data, EBMOs have engaged policy makers and the wider population on a more emotional and anecdotal level by promoting tangible examples of the business community going the extra mile to help at a time of crisis. A good example of this 'showcasing' role is the CBI's 'Business Heroes' initiative in the UK, which focused on encouraging employers and employees to share positive examples via a dedicated inbox which the CBI could then collate and shine the light on through their external communications and media network. Specific examples included redeployment of people, support to families in hardship, helping people maintain their mental and physical wellbeing, and provision of critical PPE supplies.

The reality is that there has been no shortage of source material! Here are just a few practical examples from around the world:

- ▶ coordinated calls for solidarity action, including bespoke funds established to collect contributions from businesses to help address the health crisis and support families in hardship;
- ▶ manufacture and distribution of PPE and medical equipment – employers, including beer brewing companies, diverted their activities to making huge amounts of hand gels when there was a shortage at the start of the crisis;
- ▶ hotel chains using their facilities to provide additional hospital accommodation where needed;
- ▶ employers redeploying people into high-demand sectors such as logistics and food production and distribution;
- ▶ facilitating remote working on a massive scale and putting the health and wellbeing of staff front and centre;
- ▶ proactive employee engagement, including at the crucial initial planning stages of the return-to-work process – this included staff surveys to engage and understand worker concerns and individual circumstances;
- ▶ promotion of a collaborative approach and solidarity action among employers and actively encouraging employees to take up volunteering roles.

### ► **Case Study 11 – CONFIEP<sup>30</sup>: Funding medical equipment and driving public/private sector cooperation in Peru**

The Peruvian National Confederation of Private Business Institutions (CONFIEP) donated 100 'Samay' mechanical fans to the Ministry of Health in the fight against COVID-19. The initiative is based on strong cooperation between public and private sector organizations and has involved the creation of a specific fund established to raise more than half a million dollars.

The research and development arm of the Peruvian Navy was responsible for the development of the 'Samay' mechanical fans. The first batch of these fans was delivered to the Ministry of Health in a ceremony involving the President of CONFIEP and the Commander General of the Peruvian Navy as well as government ministers. This was a unique platform for highlighting the proactive role of the business community as well as the benefits of public/private sector collaboration.

CONFIEP subsequently made other mechanical fans available as well as other equipment such as oxygen cylinders. The Emergency Fund has collected donations from over 160 companies, business guilds and entrepreneurs since the beginning of the health emergency in Peru.

►► EBMOs and the businesses they represent see themselves as an integral part of wider society; they have power to make positive change happen and assume responsibility for this.

## Creating calls to actions

EBMOs and the businesses they represent see themselves as an integral part of wider society; they have power to make positive change happen and assume responsibility for this. The galvanizing role of EBMOs has really come to the fore during the COVID-19 crisis; these calls to action resulted in the positive stories outlined previously. With reputation management identified as a major priority for the business community in most countries, the pandemic has created a platform for EBMOs to 'show', rather than 'tell'.

Building momentum around specific calls to action has been a priority and has created a 'snowball' effect in terms of member engagement. A good example of this is CCIU in Uzbekistan, which organized an online competition ('COVID-19 Challenge 2020') to stimulate innovative tools and solutions to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. People from all over Uzbekistan were invited to collaborate, combining technology and entrepreneurial skills, to develop innovative approaches to specific challenges in areas such as health, education, helping the most vulnerable, supporting small businesses and providing community support. The CCIU published the winning project ideas<sup>31</sup> on their website.

30 More information on the work of The Peruvian National Confederation of Private Business Institutions (CONFIEP) is available at: <https://www.confiep.org.pe>

31 Information on the projects taken forward in Uzbekistan can be accessed here: <https://chamber.uz/ru/news/6164>

## ► Case Study 12 – FICCI<sup>32</sup>: Policy ‘calls to action’ for supporting businesses in India

The Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) took the initiative from the outset by developing a [detailed survey](#)<sup>33</sup> on how COVID-19 was impacting on Indian industry and practical suggestions for meaningful action. The survey was widely circulated to government, industry and other stakeholders across the country. Other high-profile activities included developing a compendium for FICCI members of the government officials in different states with responsibility for facilitating the ‘essential’ movement of goods and manpower.

The FICCI also led wide-ranging member consultations to identify specific challenges and priorities across industry sectors. This feedback and insight was used to make a number of recommendations to government. Specific proposals and calls to action included:

- Support easier credit facilities for businesses, particularly those operating on very short financial cycles.
- Relax certain statutory compliance requirements in specific sectors, without penalty.
- Ensure that enforcement of bank guarantees reflect the ‘force majeure’ conditions facing business, with a minimum six months’ extension being given.
- Establish a clear point of contact in different states to help resolve industry issues as expediently as possible.
- Specific call to action to the Ministry of Labour to ensure free movement of workers engaged in manufacturing and logistics on a ‘self-declaration’ basis.

32 Information on the work of The Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) can be accessed here: <http://ficci.in/#>

33 The survey was published in March 2020. Key findings can be accessed here: <http://ficci.in/Sedocument/20497/FICCI-Survey-COVID19.pdf>

►► Cooperation between EBMOs and with workers' organizations, government departments and other stakeholders has been a big theme of the crisis. How can we use this as a platform to build on?

## ► 5. A new era of collaboration

Cooperation between EBMOs and with workers' organizations, government departments and other stakeholders has been a big theme of the crisis. How can we use this as a platform to build on? Are we witnessing a sustainable culture change and entering a new era of collaboration and social dialogue?

### Examples of innovative coalitions

EBMOs have worked closely with government as well as with other stakeholders, including trade unions. According to the ILO ACT/EMP and IOE survey, over 90 per cent of EBMOs have engaged with other business organizations and in bipartite social dialogue during the course of the crisis. This has resulted in joint guidance and timely collateral. We have also seen collaboration between individual businesses, including competing organizations in sectors like pharma and life sciences who would never have even contemplated a collaborative approach in the past. Looking ahead, this cooperative approach will be essential as we enter the next phases of the crisis and consider how best to revitalize national economies and labour markets.



**Over 90 per cent of EBMOs have engaged in bipartite social dialogue during the course of the crisis**

►► *'As we move beyond the urgent measures required, we urge ministers to work with unions and employers in the coordination of a plan for recovery, reconstruction and resilience.'*<sup>34</sup>

► **Sharan Burrow**, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation

The crisis has seen organizations move beyond ingrained differences to set up partnerships and joint initiatives. We have seen business organizations forming coalitions with workers' organizations, in order to make joint representations to government and develop pragmatic solutions for supporting the

34 Statement to G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting (LEMM), 23 April 2020.

economy. A good example of this collegiate approach was the TISK, along with other Turkish business organizations and Turkish trade unions, issuing a joint declaration and a joint statement calling for government support during the COVID-19 crisis. Examples of cooperation can be built on and can form the platform for collaborative action in the recovery phase.

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►► *‘EBMOs took the initiative in presenting solutions for supporting wages, safeguarding jobs and for ensuring loans for employers. The crisis has provided a good example of tripartite relationships not being a tick in the box, but helping a country to move forward.’*

► **Oliver Bastienne**, Chair, Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI)

A further feature of the crisis has been enhanced cooperation within the business community itself, with competing employers coming together to help make a difference and sectoral employer bodies working hand in hand with the national federation. In the Slovak Republic, AZZZ (Federation of Employers' Associations) along with other Slovak business organizations (RÚZ, AEP, SOPK, Club 500, SPPK, and ZAP SR) created a united collective voice and called upon the government to set up an economic crisis team, headed by the prime minister. According to a famous Slovak proverb: 'Whoever gives quickly, gives twice.' Creating a unified business voice injected much-needed urgency and resulted in the coalition being very direct and frank in pointing out shortcomings in the government's initial support measures for business.

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►► *‘Social packages must not have fatal consequences for companies. Flexibility and response times are crucial in these times.’*

► **Miriam Filová**, spokesperson for AZZZ  
(Federation of Employers' Associations in Slovakia)

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►► *‘Close collaboration between government, employers and unions – alongside excellent employee engagement and continued improvements in childcare, transport and testing – will be the building blocks for success.’*

► **Josh Hardie**, Deputy Director General, CBI

## Social dialogue at a time of crisis

In order to mitigate the detrimental financial impact of the crisis on companies, collective agreements were adapted, for instance by freezing wage increases for the period of the crisis. Pragmatic approaches were also adopted across specific sectors. A good example of this was the agreement in Germany of a

► **Leading business in times of Covid crisis**

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new collective agreement for the metal trades industry which reflected the realities of the crisis with provisions around pay freezes, short-time work and free days for employees who need to look after their children. A further positive example is the joint statement by the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE) and the National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU). This conveys a shared commitment from employers and worker representatives to *'re-invigorate efforts to control the COVID-19 impact and to ensure that no one is left behind, particularly people living with HIV, persons with disability, migrants and peoples in other vulnerable situations'*.

In some countries, the pandemic acted as a 'wake-up call' for the need for more dialogue and consultation in times of crisis. Discussions in the Republic of Korea provided a good example of the substantive issues that are at stake, with collaborative measures including labour unions supporting cost-cutting measures within companies necessary to maintain employment, businesses undertaking to retain as many workers as possible despite the economic uncertainty, and government providing necessary financial support to employers and an extension of social protection for affected workers (see Case Study 13). A further concrete example is the tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in Kenya by the Ministry of Labour, the Central Organization of Trade Unions in Kenya (COTU-K) and the Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE).

►► *'This is not the time to be timid; it is time to think bold and think big and innovate new policy approaches to revive economic growth. There is a need to rewrite the rules of the world of work and to accept that things must be done differently. The core of this new future should be based on social dialogue and tripartism.'*

► **Mthunzi Mdwaba**, IOE Vice-President to the ILO<sup>35</sup>

Social partners globally, regionally and nationally have come together with a shared goal of safeguarding sustainable enterprises, employment and livelihoods based on strong social dialogue. This is encapsulated in the March 2020 joint statement by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) stressing *'the important role that social dialogue and social partners play in the control of the virus at the workplace and beyond, but also in avoiding massive job losses in the short and medium term'*. The statement also underlines that fact that joint responsibility and dialogue are needed to foster stability in the longer term. On a more general note, the potential for collaboration between EBMOs and workers' organizations in times of crises is the theme of the ILO's recent *Managing Conflicts and Disasters* report.<sup>36</sup>

A good example at the regional level is the statement issued in March 2020 by the European social partners – Business Europe and European Trade Union Confederation as well as the European Centre of Enterprises and SMEUnited. This statement encouraged national governments to take decisive action to support national health services, reinforce social protection systems and mobilize unused structural funds and other EU funds to provide financial support for workers and the self-employed. The joint statement also called for credit access and financial support for enterprises, especially all types of SMEs, affected by lockdown and emergency measures, with a coordinated intervention from the EU budget, the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank, and national promotional banks.

<sup>35</sup> Speech to the 2020 ILO Virtual Global Summit on Covid-19 and the world of work.

<sup>36</sup> The ILO's *Managing Conflicts and Disasters* report can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_741421.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_741421.pdf)



### ▶ Case Study 13 – Republic of Korea tripartite agreement

The 'Declaration of a tripartite agreement to overcome the COVID-19 crisis' was formally adopted in the Republic of Korea on 6 March 2020. This was a powerful statement of collaborative intent between government and social partners. The agreement acknowledged the need to work together to address the pressing challenges caused by the pandemic; it underlined the need to protect workers and businesses and to safeguard employment.

Following the government's announcement of a 'new Korean deal for employment', the two largest central trade unions – the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) – announced on 12 May that, for the first time in 21 years, they would resume tripartite talks on employment-related matters. Although this fell short of a formal agreement being signed, the acute socio-economic impact of COVID-19 had led to a tangible step forward in terms of dialogue and collective action.

### ▶ Case Study 14 – EFC<sup>37</sup>: Establishment of a tripartite COVID-19 taskforce in Sri Lanka

An ad hoc tripartite taskforce on COVID-19 was established in Sri Lanka to make recommendations on safeguarding the interests of workers and employers and to facilitate social dialogue. This taskforce led to a tripartite agreement between the Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC), trade unions and the Ministry of Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations.

EFC activities included policy recommendations to government aimed at ensuring that workers – as well as businesses – are supported during the crisis. The tripartite agreement represented a rare occasion where all stakeholders agreed on a fixed minimum wage at national level and covered specific areas such as pay rates for days worked as well as provisions for workers to receive a proportion of their wages for days where they are not working. The experience in Sri Lanka provides a powerful example of the business community placing the wellbeing of workers at the forefront of their response to the crisis.

The key to the EFC's overall response to the crisis was speed. As well as feeding into the taskforce, this included rapid internal changes within the secretariat and prompt communication with members. The outcome was timely and targeted advice on priority areas for business such as home-working modalities, and government notifications on curfew restrictions and on 'essential services' that could operate.

<sup>37</sup> More details on the work of The Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC) can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.employers.lk>

### ► **Case Study 15 – SNEF<sup>38</sup>: A joint approach to avoiding job losses in Singapore**

The Ministry of Manpower, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) signed a tripartite advisory statement on managing workforce and employment challenges inherent to the COVID-19 crisis. The statement invites businesses to use 'retrenchment' (ie job cuts) as a last resort and only after all other options have been fully explored.

Alternatives to retrenchment specifically referenced in the statement include:

- re-skilling and up-skilling current workers;
- redeployment of employees to other parts of the company;
- flexible work schedules and short work weeks;
- wage adjustment following social dialogue;
- unpaid leave.

The document also underlines the need for effective consultation, transparency and engagement with unions in cases where retrenchment is the only option. From a business perspective, the statement underlines the fact that the vast majority of employers care passionately about the people who work for them and will look at all other options rather than making job cuts.

### ► **Case Study 16 – CPC<sup>39</sup>: Leading the SiEmpre initiative in Chile**

The Solidarity and Business Innovation initiative (SiEmpre<sup>40</sup>) brought together companies, entrepreneurs and business groups with a clear common goal: to help Chile build back better. This initiative, led by the Confederation of Production and Trade of Chile (CPC), includes a coalition of sector-specific bodies in manufacturing, mining, construction, agriculture and financial services. The core aim was to galvanize businesses to contribute to an emergency fund, covering two priority areas for the country: food and health.

The pandemic impacted most severely on the employment and quality of life of some of the most vulnerable people. In March 2020, employers and entrepreneurs launched an emergency fund to help meet the most pressing health challenges facing the population. The contribution of businesses and entrepreneurs – in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development and charitable organizations – also resulted in the delivery of boxes with basic foodstuffs for at least 125,000 families from the most vulnerable segment of society.

SiEmpre has raised over \$100 million to support the country's food distribution and health efforts. The initiative provides a powerful example of what can be achieved through solidarity, innovation, and collaboration.

38 Information on the work of The Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) is available here: <https://snef.org.sg>

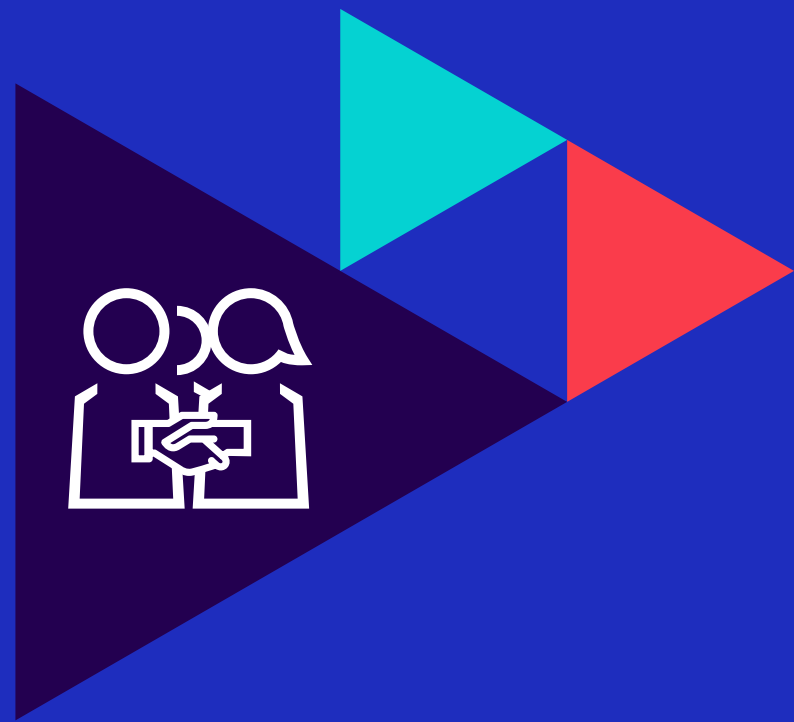
39 Details on the work of The Confederation of Production and Trade of Chile can be accessed here: <https://www.cpc.cl>

40 Information on the SiEmpre initiative in Chile can be accessed at the following link: <https://siempreporchile.cl>

# ▶ Part 2

**Taking a lead: how will the role, services and impact of EBMOs evolve to ‘Build Back Better’?**

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## Part 2

# Taking a lead: how will the role, services and impact of EBMOs evolve to ‘Build Back Better’?

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Amidst the various pandemic-related discussions, there is one clear area of consensus: the so-called ‘new normal’ does not simply mean pressing reset and returning to how things were before the crisis. There is a shared desire to use the disruption for positive change. The opportunity for EBMOs is to build on what has been achieved during the height of the global health crisis and to take a lead on emerging policy challenges. This is also the time for EBMOs to take a lead in developing new services for members and new advocacy approaches.

Based on the feedback from companies, policy makers and other stakeholders, the next phase of the crisis and post-pandemic era will be unique platforms for EBMOs to reposition their role and ‘offer’ in the following areas:

- 1. Taking a lead on economic and labour market recovery** – As the health crisis morphs into a full-blown economic and employment crisis, EBMOs will play a pivotal role in leading the comeback trail. This will include building the right environment for employers to grow and drive economic growth and helping to address the looming unemployment crisis.
- 2. Taking a lead on emerging policy challenges** – National governments and international institutions have identified a range of intensifying challenges, including youth employment, equality and inclusion, the informal economy, new working patterns and long-term approaches to health and safety and worker wellbeing. EBMOs can take a proactive approach in developing new solutions to these emerging challenges.
- 3. Taking a lead on the future of work** – EBMOs around the world have driven thought-leadership programmes on the future of work for a number of years. Pre-empting evolving business models and new skills needs will be more important than ever for businesses and economies to thrive in the ‘new normal’.
- 4. Taking a lead on reputation and risk management** – There has never been a more important time to take a proactive stance on reputation and crisis management. A fast-changing public policy environment, the pitfalls and increased scrutiny of social channels, and 24-hour media attention increase the possibility of negative developments and stories that EBMOs will be called on to manage in the future.
- 5. Taking a lead on new services** – What does the ‘new normal’ mean for the role, advocacy voice and member services delivered by EBMOs? In a disrupted and volatile economic, social and business landscape, now is the time to innovate and seize new opportunities.

►► One clear message from the COVID-19 crisis is this: if the private sector shuts down, the country shuts down; there is no economy and no job-creation without a living and breathing business community.

## ► 1. Taking a lead on economic and labour market recovery

As the health crisis morphs into a full-blown economic and employment crisis, EBMOs will play a pivotal role in leading the comeback trail. One clear message from the COVID-19 crisis is this: if the private sector shuts down, the country shuts down; there is no economy and no job-creation without a living and breathing business community. The road to recovery will be tortuous. EBMOs will be at the forefront of helping national economies and labour markets to adapt and reboot.

### Creating the environment for businesses to bounce back

The re-opening of national economies is not a linear process – there will be setbacks linked to new spikes and localized or nationwide lockdowns. On this last point, the challenge for EBMOs in many countries will be to ensure a strong regional – as well as national – voice and presence. As well as feeding into reactive approaches to localized infection increases, a regional approach is likely to be at the heart of future debates around local skills needs and inward investment. In some countries, the crisis has ignited the broader debate around devolved powers to regional government structures.

►► *‘Some sectors may be altered fundamentally by the crisis, others may see new opportunity. Consumer habits may change. Government approaches to spending, to policy development may change. EBMO leaders should be conscious of one key fact: member enterprises in 2021 will operate in a very different environment from 2019. You need to get there before them.’*

► **Phil O’Reilly**, Chair, Business at OECD

A supportive regulatory environment to enable companies to focus on what they do best should be developed: driving growth and creating jobs. There were some positive signs during the height of the health crisis of national governments recognizing the legitimate bandwidth concerns of private sector employers – especially SMEs with limited access to HR support. Good examples of this included

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the UK government agreeing to delay changes to personal taxation of freelancers and independent professionals and the deferral of collective labour agreements (CLAs) in Sweden.

At a time when employers across most sectors were fighting for survival and looking at every avenue to avoid widespread job cuts, it was critical to avoid creating distraction such as implementing new taxation rules or new employment regulations. The same argument applies to the next phase of the crisis: at a time when employers across all key sectors of the economy are focusing all their energy on getting their businesses back up and running, we need to avoid the distraction and ensure that employers have the breathing space and flexibility they need.

This argument is not advocating a 'free for all' or race to the bottom. Proportionate regulations that are effectively enforced are in the interests of compliant businesses as well as workers. It is simply a call for a pragmatic approach that recognizes the post-pandemic priorities as well as emerging future-of-work dynamics already in train pre-COVID. Finding effective ways of taking this message forward is a post-lockdown priority for EBMOs around the world.

► *'Supporting enterprises to return people to work is the most crucial and important action government needs to take. Any outcome short of a clear strategy to help enterprises recover and return people to work will not help in the much-anticipated recovery.'*

► **Jacqueline Mugo**, CEO, Federation of Kenya Employers

► **Case Study 17 – How are EBMOs in Europe driving economic recovery and planning ahead?**

Looking beyond immediate responses to the crisis, EBMOs have developed a range of initiatives aimed at the longer term and at 'future-proofing' competitiveness. Promoting public/private investments in key areas such as 'greening' national economies form part of this forward-focused agenda. Examples from across Europe include:

- **NHO (Norway):** The NHO launched a new webpage, 'Ten ambitions for Norway in 2030 – roadmaps for the future of business'<sup>41</sup>. This brings together articles, interviews, videos and other information that presents a compelling vision for a way out of the COVID-19 crisis and for a sustainable future.
- **DI (Denmark):** The 'Denmark out of crisis – back to green growth' plan<sup>42</sup> contains 70 proposals for a successful re-opening of society, covering five areas: climate action, infrastructure, investment in research, innovation and digitalization, boosting Denmark's role as an export nation and stimulating the economy. The aim is to create 30,000 jobs and raise wealth by 45 billion DKK.

41 The NHO 'Ten Ambitions for Norway' roadmap is at: <https://www.nho.no/tema/neste-trekk/>

42 Information on the 'Denmark out of crisis – back to green growth' plan is available at: <https://www.danskindustri.dk/om-di/kontakt-os/presse/arkiv/pressemeddelelser/2020/4/di-fremlogger-milliardplan-for-danmarks-vej-ud-af-krisen/>

- **Ibec (Ireland):** In its major new campaign, 'Reboot and Reimagine'<sup>43</sup>, Ibec is setting out its vision and roadmap for recovery and a sustainable economy. The campaign outlines a comprehensive range of thematic policy actions in three phases: 100 days, end of 2020, and the end of 2023.
- **Confindustria (Italy):** Confindustria's policy proposals to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy<sup>44</sup> are based on six core pillars: public investment and infrastructure, an ambitious recovery plan at the European level, measures to guarantee liquidity of companies, regulatory simplification, incentives for youth employment and action for stimulating private investment.
- **FEB (Belgium):** The FEB's proposals for recovery<sup>45</sup> focused on measures for promoting economic growth, and for stimulating demand and investment. Boosting competitiveness must also involve new labour market measures as well as support for digitalization and the green economy.
- **CEOE (Spain):** The CEOE recovery plan focuses on transitioning to green energy, building trust through legal certainty and social dialogue and creating a more flexible regulatory framework. The plan also makes the case for more support for SMEs, inclusive growth through vocational training and public-private partnerships in areas such as education, health and infrastructure. In November 2020, CEOE followed this up with a specific ten-point plan<sup>46</sup> for optimizing EU funds to drive recovery.

## Rebooting national jobs markets

The health crisis has inevitably led to an economic crisis that in turn has led to an employment crisis. In addition to working with policy makers to facilitate business recovery growth (as outlined previously), how can EBMOs take a lead in helping national governments to meet the looming unemployment challenge?

Based on the latest feedback from policy makers and industry leaders – and on collaborative actions that are already under way – below are practical examples of what can be achieved:

- Work with governments and relevant stakeholders to design a comprehensive strategy to foster productivity growth. In the post-COVID-19 economic environment, productivity enhancement will be key for enterprises to build financial buffers, that is, cash reserves and strong balance sheets, invest in improving the knowledge and skills of workers, and invest in resilience-boosting technology, thus enabling them to be economically and structurally resilient to cope with future supply and demand shocks, and to adapt to new and emerging market conditions. In this context, the role of EBMOs will be essential to guide and support their members in the pursuit of productivity growth.
- Work with governments to develop the right incentives for employers to retain existing staff – particularly at the end of furlough and job retention schemes – and hire new staff. This must also involve identifying short- and longer-term skills needs to ensure that education policy and

43 Background on the Ibec 'Reboot and Reimagine' campaign can be accessed here: <https://www.ibec.ie/connect-and-learn/media/2020/05/11/ibec-launches-major-new-reboot-and-reimagine-campaign>

44 Confindustria's policy proposals to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 can be accessed here: <https://www.confindustria.it/wcm/connect/cea875ab-58b0-40a3-b648-f88dde682b1f/Assi+portanti+di+azione+e+reazione+all%27arretramento+dell%27economia.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-cea875ab-58b0-40a3-b648-f88dde682b1f-n2-qFFu>

45 FEB's proposals for recovery are available here: [https://www.feb.be/globalassets/publicaties/een-4x4-turborelanceplan-om-het-groeipotentieel-van-onze-economie-te-versterken/plan-de-relance-4x4-turbo\\_fr\\_def.pdf](https://www.feb.be/globalassets/publicaties/een-4x4-turborelanceplan-om-het-groeipotentieel-van-onze-economie-te-versterken/plan-de-relance-4x4-turbo_fr_def.pdf)

46 Details of CEOE's '10 Measures to Optimize the Funds of the European Recovery Plan' can be accessed here: <https://www.ceoe.es/es/contenido/actualidad/videos/10-medidas-de-ceoe-para-optimizar-los-fondos-del-plan-europeo-de-recuperacion>

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government-funded re-skilling and retraining initiatives make the most impact and are relevant to an evolving business landscape.

- Identify physical and digital infrastructure gaps to enhance local economic development by improving market connectivity and lowering transaction costs. Infrastructure spending is also conducive to job-creation, which in turn may translate into higher consumer spending. Moreover, EBMOs may also play an important role to identify regulatory constraints at sectoral level hindering private investment, business development and the creation of new enterprises.
- Take a proactive stance on equality and inclusion and youth employment. Rising unemployment will disproportionately affect young people and under-represented groups in the labour market. EBMOs can play a galvanizing role in ensuring employers maintain and enhance a proactive approach to workplace inclusion and equality.
- Embed flexible working opportunities. Flexible hiring (providing part-time, flexible hours or remote working opportunities) will enable those with caring responsibilities and travel restrictions to reintegrate into the labour market. At the same time, employers may be cautious about hiring permanent staff during a time of extreme uncertainty, but they can provide temporary roles – either directly or through specialist staffing agencies – that can lead to permanent opportunities as certainty returns.
- Drive public/private sector partnerships. As seen in a number of the case studies presented (for example, CONFIEP working with the Navy and the Ministry of Health in Peru), EBMOs have driven strong collaborative activities with public sector organizations during the health crisis. This collaboration – particularly with public sector employment services – will form an important response to the unemployment challenge.

Social partnerships and cooperation will be key in a post-COVID-19 world. The ability of representative organizations to mobilize collective views and develop new solutions to emerging employment challenges has never been more important. Governments and social partners need to plan for the jobs and skills of the future, while also looking after the jobs of today. The debate around maintaining government support to avoid unemployment surges is a live one in most countries. As governments around the world plan for the next phase of the crisis, international coordination can help to ensure that the right policy choices are made. In the words of ILO Director General Guy Ryder: *'It can't be every country for itself; we're all in this together, until we are all out of it.'*

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►► *'We are not going to be returning to a new normal; we will be confronting a new reality. The private sector will be an essential driver of economic recovery. We must ensure that we join hands across borders and work together in a multilateral way on an economic recovery that is inclusive and that acknowledges the importance of maintaining the viability of vulnerable economies as well as stronger ones.'*

► **Peter Robinson**, President and CEO of the United States Council for International Business

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►► *'We expect the world to be profoundly changed post-COVID. We are urging every enterprise and individual to train up to meet the new challenges and opportunities.'*

► **Wayne Chen**, President of the Caribbean Employers Confederation



## ► 2. Taking a lead on emerging policy challenges

National governments and international institutions have identified a range of intensifying challenges, including youth employment, equality and inclusion, the informal economy, new working patterns, transitioning to low-carbon economies, and long-term approaches to health and safety and worker wellbeing. The opportunity is there for EBMOs to reinvigorate the collective power of business, shape the future and find innovative solutions to emerging issues affecting the workplace and national economies.

### Productivity growth

The years following the recovery from the 2007–09 Global Financial Crisis have been characterized by a marked slowdown in the growth of labour productivity. The slowdown has led to a contraction of firms' growth, stifled wage increases and held-back global economic growth. Trends of GDP growth per employed person indicate persistent improvements in the growth rates of labour productivity between the late 1980s and the start of the financial crisis in 2007. Since then, labour productivity growth rates, both globally and in developing economies, have steadily declined. This global trend is worrisome because of its implications for economic growth and the development trajectories of developing and emerging-market economies.

Productivity growth is the main driver of the catch-up process through which developing countries with lower-income per capita can reach per capita income levels observed in advanced economies. The empirical evidence suggests that 60–90 per cent of the cross-country variations in per capita income can be attributed to differences in productivity growth. Among the devastating economic, financial, social and labour market consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deepening of the deterioration in productivity, which before the ongoing crisis had not yet returned to levels observed before the 2007–09 Global Financial Crisis, could significantly impact the development of enterprises, and hinder economic and employment growth. Hence, EBMOs' role will be essential to advocate for and work with governments and stakeholders to develop an integral strategy to foster productivity, embracing it as a lever for socio-economic development. In this respect, the [Driving up Productivity](#)<sup>47</sup> guide designed by ACT/EMP is aimed at helping EBMOs get started.

### Youth employment

As part of the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth (DJY), the ILO and partner organizations conducted the Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19,<sup>48</sup> which received over 12,600 responses from people aged 18–34 years from across all regions. The survey was published in August 2020 and showed that one in six young people had stopped working since the outbreak of COVID-19. The impact is especially severe for those with limited work experience and those engaged in entry jobs in areas such as clerical support, services, sales and crafts. The survey also shows a disproportionate impact on young women.

►► *'An important issue to face during this new stage where we must live with COVID-19 is professional technical training. We must develop new competencies and skills to enable people to integrate into a new labour market.'*

► **Juan Carlos Sikaffy**, President of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise

47 The ACT/EMP 'Driving up Productivity' guide was published in November 2020 and can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS\\_759669/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_759669/lang-en/index.htm)

48 The full survey can be accessed at: <https://www.decentjobsforyouth.org/campaign/COVID19-survey>

▶▶ With governments and policy makers looking for solutions and innovative approaches, the business community can reach out and play a leading role in addressing the youth employment challenge.

With governments and policy makers looking for solutions and innovative approaches, the business community can reach out and play a leading role in addressing the youth employment challenge. EBMOs and industry leaders in most countries have been proactive in this area for some time; the impact of the pandemic on jobs and education makes this contribution more important than ever. Specific areas where EBMOs help make change happen include:

- ▶ Promote the take-up of work experience internships, apprenticeships, traineeships and other employment initiatives aimed at young people. Raising awareness and galvanizing employer engagement will be more important than ever in the new normal.
- ▶ Review hiring criteria and procedures. Driving innovative approaches to recruitment and selection will ensure that specific barriers to young people (such as past experience) are reviewed. Many employers recognize the benefits of hiring based on attitude and potential; EBMOs can facilitate good practice exchanges and access to recruitment and employment experts for their members.
- ▶ Work with schools and colleges. Helping to raise aspirations and awareness of how the world of work is evolving will be more important than ever in a COVID-disrupted era. EBMOs have a pivotal role to play in getting as many members as possible to engage with local schools and colleges and build better bridges between education and the world of work.
- ▶ Revitalize vocational education. EBMOs can play a leading role in helping revitalize vocational education and training institutions. This could take the form of focus groups with industry representatives to feed into specific training programmes and advisory committees established to understand employers' needs and design programmes accordingly. Vocational institutions can act as a bridge between labour supply and demand, thereby contributing to reducing skills mismatch and unemployment.
- ▶ Inform education and skills policy. Using the practical insight from members on current and future skills needs will ensure that EBMOs continue to feed into government policy on education and skills. Boosting opportunities and employability and using new technology to widen access to education is in everybody's interest.

## Transitioning to low-carbon economies

The 'Build Back Better' agenda includes a specific focus on making a real impact on sustainability and on transitioning towards a low-carbon economy. EBMOs have adopted a positive and proactive approach on environmental issues and have showcased positive steps taken by individual businesses within their membership. The role of business in this hugely topical area will come under increasing scrutiny in the new normal.

A recent study<sup>49</sup> by the ILO and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) shows that the transition to a net-zero emission economy could create 15 million net new jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2030. This could play a significant part in a sustainable recovery from the pandemic. Around 7.5 million

49 The ILO/IDB Report can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_752069/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_752069/lang--en/index.htm)

jobs would be lost in fossil fuel electricity, fossil fuel extraction, and animal-based food production, but these lost jobs will be more than offset by 22.5 million jobs being created in agriculture and plant-based food production, renewable electricity, forestry, construction and manufacturing. EBMOs will have a big part to play in helping to manage these transitions.



**The transition to a net-zero-emission economy could create 15 million net new jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2030.**

The report also offers a blueprint on how countries can create decent jobs and transition to net-zero emissions. This includes policies promoting decent work in rural areas, enhancing social protection and supporting displaced enterprises, communities and workers. Social dialogue between employers' and workers' organizations and governments is essential to designing the long-term strategies that will not only achieve net-zero emissions, but also create jobs, reduce inequality and deliver on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

►► EBMOs will have a key role to play in raising awareness among the business community about the importance and practical implications of a gradual transition towards a green economy and a net-zero-carbon economy.

EBMOs will have a key role to play in raising awareness among the business community about the importance and practical implications of a gradual transition towards a green economy and a net-zero-carbon economy. This requires a structural transformation of consumption and production patterns. EBMOs can advocate for the development of coherent economic policy frameworks and incentives to support business recovery and to encourage enterprises' adoption of renewable energies, low-carbon production processes and clean technologies. In particular, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises require support to foster productivity growth, business resilience, and enhanced management practices. An important challenge in developing and emerging-market economies will be to incorporate informal economic units and workers into the transition to a sustainable formal economy. This will require a highly pragmatic approach to devising economic policy frameworks.

National financial constraints are being exacerbated by the ongoing crisis; this makes improving the allocation of public investment more important than ever. EBMOs can advocate for a gradual transition that requires large-scale investments in infrastructure in the use of renewable electricity to electrify urban and remote rural areas, including poor and marginalized populations, efficient public transport, and sustainable and economically competitive cities.

The structural transformation of production systems and the reallocation of workers from carbon-intensive sectors to renewable-energy-driven industries also require large investments to close the skills and technological gaps and support enterprises' reconversion through the provision of economic incentives (such as tax credits, investment allowance, accelerated depreciation, among other fiscal instruments) and direct financial support, for instance through national development banking systems, for the acquisition of clean technologies and to afford renewable energies.

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Government support is essential to the delivery of large-scale up-skilling and re-skilling programmes. In parallel to this there will need to be a focus on strengthening social protection systems to mitigate the effect of increased structural unemployment and prevent the expansion of the informal economy. This will be particularly challenging in a context of a weak, uneven and slow recovery and with governments' finances severely constrained. Pursuing macroeconomic stability and inclusive economic growth will be essential for a sustained recovery and a cost-effective, sustainable and inclusive transition to a green economy.

EBMOs can also play a pivotal role in supporting their members to develop an enterprise risk management strategy (ERMS) to be better equipped for coping with climate change impacts and black-swan events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This can take the form of targeted guidance, courses and technical support on negotiating the energy transition and on developing a comprehensive ERMS.

▀▀ *'The pandemic is no reason for deviating from social reform. In fact, the crisis will act as an accelerator in progressing agendas around the environment, equality and the fourth industrial revolution.'*

► **Katrin Jakobsdóttir**, Prime Minister of Iceland<sup>50</sup>

## Addressing the informal economy

The crisis has shone the light on latent inequalities and vulnerabilities. More than 6 workers in 10 in the world still operate in the informal economy; this represents over 2 billion people. Informal employment represents 90 per cent of total employment in low-income countries and 67 per cent in middle-income countries. With the renewed focus on jobs and decent work within the context of COVID-19, creating new structures to address the informal economy remains an absolute priority.

The recent [ILO Briefing Paper on COVID-19 and the informal economy](#)<sup>51</sup> identifies immediate policy challenges and the feedback from EBMOs underlines that making progress in this area is a shared agenda. Specific ways forward include:

- **Building partnerships** - This is a priority for making change happen, particularly enhanced dialogue and cooperation between the tripartite partners and the organizations representing those in the informal economy.
- **Facilitating transitions** - There is a huge role for the business community to play in facilitating the transition to formality for individuals and enterprises. The informal sector itself is largely a by-product of protracted periods of low productivity and low growth, forging a vicious cycle of productivity stagnation and informality, leading to a low-income trap. EBMOs can work with governments on solutions for helping informal economic units increase their productivity through improved management practices and access to credit. Other measures will include tackling corruption, making it easier and less costly to operate in the formal economy, improving macroeconomic conditions and helping individuals develop the skills and awareness to thrive in the formal economy. Moreover, businesses can create local supply chains and service agreements that enable micro enterprises operating in the informal economy to make the transition into formality.

<sup>50</sup> Speaking at the ILO Global Summit in July 2020.

<sup>51</sup> The ILO brief on COVID-19 and the Informal Economy can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_743623.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743623.pdf)

- ▶ **Identifying policy solutions** – Social partners must work with policy makers to identify the right incentives and levers of change. In countries like India, one focus area is on helping small businesses in the formal economy to scale up to create more formal employment opportunities for individual workers. Effective enforcement and driving compliance and ethics through supply chains are two other levers of change.
- ▶ **Creating sustainable alternatives** – Employers operating in a volatile 24/7 economy will always need agile and flexible workforce solutions. Individuals sometimes need to find work and earn money quickly – even if it is as a stop-gap. Facilitating 'legitimate' means of flexible and agile work by developing a well-regulated recruitment and staffing industry is a means of building vibrant labour markets that work for employers and workers and limit the need for informality.

On this last point, specialist recruitment providers and staffing agencies – operating under an effective regulatory framework – can provide an important outlet. According to the World Employment Confederation's 2020 Economic Report,<sup>52</sup> the global private employment services industry placed nearly 58 million people around the world into formal work. Harnessing the sector's contribution is one way of helping individuals transition from informality into flexible forms of employment that are established and regulated.

Reaching a tipping point on formal rather than informal work will take time, but there is a desire to address this issue with renewed vigour. This was a message from the ILO's Global Summit on COVID-19 and the World of Work. Making a decisive impact is in the interests of compliant businesses, taxpayers and national governments as well as the workers themselves. Progress has been made on understanding the drivers of informality and practical barriers to formality. Creating tangible change in this area will be a key facet of the global ambition to 'build back better'.



**The employment services sector placed 58 million people into jobs globally. Harnessing this contribution is part of the solution for addressing unemployment and informality.**

## Equality and inclusion

'We may all be in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat.' This has been a common refrain since the start of the pandemic. The crisis has shone the light on latent inequalities in society and in labour markets across the world. The time for talking is over; the time for action is now. The two core questions are: what actions can have the most impact in both the short and longer term, and which organizations can we look at to drive sustainable change?

▶▶ *'We are all in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat.'*

▶ **Sangita Reddy**, President, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries<sup>53</sup>

52 The full report can be accessed at: <https://wecglobal.org/publication-post/economic-report-2020/>

53 Speaking at the 2020 ILO Summit.

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EBMOs are already taking a lead through a number of activities identified in this report, including good practice guides, peer-to-peer networks and providing members with access to experts on equality and inclusion issues. What other business-led initiatives will drive further progress? Examples include:

- **A radical review of current recruitment strategies** – Revamping the criteria and procedures that employers use to hire staff is an essential first step in boosting workplace diversity and inclusion. As well as boosting equality, good recruitment is a key element in driving productivity, creativity, diversity of thought and a positive workplace culture. Existing initiatives such as the [Good Recruitment Collective](#)<sup>54</sup> in the UK – a peer-to-peer network sharing good practice on innovative and inclusive recruitment strategies – are providing regular updates and insight that can be shared on the global level.
- **Dismantling barriers to progression** – Making change happen on equality is not just about helping under-represented groups get into work; it is also about helping people to progress in work. The necessary step-change on equality will be measured on diversity and representation at all levels, including in senior leadership positions. How can businesses identify and address latent barriers? What leadership programmes have resulted in tangible changes? EBMOs are already driving this agenda, showcasing progress and practising what they preach by ensuring that their own leadership structure is diverse and inclusive.
- **Promoting inclusive business culture and leadership** – Making change happen on inclusion and equality starts at the top; EBMOs are already playing a role here by engaging business leaders within their membership around this agenda. An inclusive culture allows for diversity of thought, and ultimately is better for the bottom line. The business case for change was the core theme of the [ILO Women in Business and Management report](#),<sup>55</sup> these are messages that EBMOs can cascade down to the business community on a national level.

Building back better must involve more inclusive economies and labour markets; the business community will be at the forefront of making change happen by reviewing hiring and selection procedures and dismantling any latent barriers to internal progression. National governments must work in partnership with EBMOs and worker organizations to ensure that progress is made on all strands of the inclusion agenda: race, disability, gender, LGBTI, age, religion, political opinion, national extraction and social origin.

Regulatory responses may include pay reporting and quotas, but the business community can take the initiative to set their own voluntary targets and learn from each other in terms of effective approaches to diversity and inclusion. Showcasing what works and galvanizing industry leaders around this crucial agenda will be a post-pandemic priority for EBMOs. Developing innovative tools such as the [Malkia App](#)<sup>56</sup> and training programme (aimed at supporting the career progression of female workers – see Case Study 18) and stimulating global exchanges on specific debating points such as unconscious bias and the potential impact of AI and automation on the equality agenda are further examples of the galvanizing role that EBMOs can play in this hugely important area.

54 Information on the REC's Good Recruitment Collective is available at: <https://www.rec.uk.com/employers/grc>

55 The ILO 2019 *Women in Business and Management* report can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_700953.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_700953.pdf)

56 Information on the Malkia initiative can be accessed here: <https://www.itcilo.org/courses/malkia-women-managers-rise-skilling-success>

### ▶ Case Study 18 – Malkia: A practical tool for making change happen on gender equality

Despite some progress, women are still under-represented in leadership positions. Malkia is a mobile tool enabling women to gain the necessary skills and confidence to grow their careers and have a positive impact on their companies.

The initiative is initially aimed at women line managers in companies, institutions and business organizations who have direct responsibilities for teams from which future leaders can emerge. Available through an app, Malkia helps women gain a better understanding of their career path and competences as women managers, learn new aptitudes and skills as well as strengthen their capacity to face workplace challenges through coaching. The four key ingredients are:

- ▶ **orientation:** information on gender biases at the workplace and a self-assessment tool;
- ▶ **learning:** interactive learning modules on managerial skills and opportunities to practise through simulations;
- ▶ **coaching:** personal action planning, guidance and tips;
- ▶ **resources:** a resource library, video playlist and access to a community of peers.

This timely initiative is being driven by ITCILO and actively supported by ILO ACT/EMP. It is a good example of a practical tool that can deliver tangible benefits to the business community as well as a solution to public policy priority in many countries – ie ensuring equality and gender balance in senior roles. The collateral benefits for EBMOs is that it provides a useful tool for members and underlines the business community's commitment to driving social progress.

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▶▶ Building back better must involve more inclusive economies and labour markets; the business community will be at the forefront of making change happen by reviewing hiring and selection procedures and dismantling any latent barriers to internal progression.

►► EBMOs around the world have driven thought-leadership programmes on the future of work for a number of years.

### ► 3. Taking a lead on the future of work

EBMOs around the world have driven thought-leadership programmes on the future of work for a number of years. Pre-empting evolving business models, the impact of automation, new skills needs and evolving expectations and needs of workers will be more important than ever for businesses and economies to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Research suggests that the use of automation, robots and chatbots has accelerated during the crisis and is likely to continue in the post-pandemic era. EBMOs will need to take a view on these big debating points and work with their members to strike the right balance between optimizing technology-driven cost savings and re-skilling workers.

►► *‘What will the new economy look like? How do we build one that we would be proud to live in?’*

► **Julie Su**, Secretary for the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA)

### Looking at the future through the pandemic prism

How have the expectations and needs of employees, consumers and clients changed on the back of the pandemic? What job roles and skills will be most in demand going forward? How will employment relations and regulatory landscapes need to evolve in the post-lockdown era? These are just some of the forward-looking questions that the business community can help find answers to. Pre-COVID, EBMOs around the world were taking a lead on the future of work agenda. This forward-looking role will become even more important as a means of healing national economies and jobs markets as they recover from the crisis.



**83 per cent of workers across the world are worried about job loss due to automation, new competition and other external factors.<sup>57</sup>**

One of the challenges ahead will be to inform and reassure people about how fundamental changes to the world of work will have an impact. Automation and the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) were hot topics pre-pandemic; the speed of change could accelerate in the new normal and the technological

<sup>57</sup> Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>



divide could widen. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>58</sup> shows an ongoing lack of trust in institutions and a general loss of hope; on the whole, people do not believe they will be better off in five years' time. The same survey shows that 83 per cent of workers across the world are worried about job loss due to automation, new competition and other external factors; nearly two in three feel the pace of technological change is too fast. EBMOs can play a pivotal role by working with national governments to ensure that these concerns are understood and addressed. Painting a vision for a future of work that inspires hope and aspiration rather than concern and fear must be a shared goal.

The least affected enterprises (and least affected economies) that are able to recover more quickly from the crisis will be in a better position to adopt new technologies and benefit from labour-augmenting technological change to increase productivity, gain market share, and build economic resilience. This scenario could exacerbate job polarization and income inequality. The adoption of technology – whether new or conventional – must not be taken for granted. MSMEs in particular face multiple barriers, from financial constraints to lack of skilled technical staff. Access to experts and peer-to-peer exchanges on technology-driven change will remain crucial. This is a further example of how the convening role of EBMOs can become increasingly relevant and business-critical.

▀▀ *‘No human being should be condemned to do the work that can be done by machine. Our objective must be to become more human, and we have the machine to do the routines that we can then preserve ourselves from.’*

► **Roberto Mangabeira Unger**, Philosopher and Author

## Where can EBMOs add the most value?

The future of work is a congested arena, with think tanks, government departments, academics, institutions, business consultants and technology providers all jostling for position. How can EBMOs continue to provide specific value in this area? Based on the activities that a number of EBMOs are already leading, as well as on the insight from individual businesses and policy makers, there are a number of specific opportunities to continue making an impact:

- **Unique data** – The ability of EBMOs to generate timely and practical data to inform government actions has been an important feature during the crisis. This will also play a pivotal role in influencing public policy, public opinion and business practices linked to the future of work and emerging workforce challenges.
- **Making sense of what is out there** – With so many organizations and individuals driving activities around the future of work, EBMOs have a key curation and filtering role to play; they can help businesses and policy makers make sense of the ‘wall of sound’. Representative organizations around the world and in specific sectors have established Future of Jobs Observatories and Future of Work Institutes to review and interpret the swathes of external research as well as driving their own bespoke research and thought leadership.
- **Peer-to-peer exchanges** – No one has definitive answers to all the future-focused workplace questions, especially in light of the great unknown that the COVID-19 crisis has engulfed us all in. However, there is real benefit to be gained from the peer-to-peer exchanges and access to experts that EBMOs can facilitate. This is especially true in areas such as harnessing new technology,

58 Ibid.

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implementing new working patterns, anticipating evolving employee expectations and pre-empting future skills needs.

- **Identifying what works** – ‘The best way to predict the future is to create it.’ This often-used quote is an apt summary of a further way that EBMOs and the business community can add value to the future-focused debate: by trialling new approaches and drawing the right conclusions in terms of what can be replicated and scaled up, what works and delivers benefits for employers and workers, and what doesn’t. EBMOs are in a unique position to capture examples of innovative future-focused initiatives being taken by employers and using this to add a practical edge to future-of-work discussions with policy makers and within the business community.

► **Case Study 19 – COSEP<sup>59</sup>: Driving equality and occupational health in Nicaragua**

The Nicaragua Senior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) launched a targeted web portal to inform and support companies during the pandemic. The portal also served to raise awareness among the wider population and formed part of over 300 proactive actions led by COSEP during the course of the pandemic.

An important element of COSEP’s proactive activities has focused on combating discrimination in the workplace during the COVID-19 crisis. The core message of the campaign was, ‘If COVID-19 does not discriminate, neither should you,’ with webinars and good practice exchanges rolled out in collaboration with the ILO’s Department of Employers’ Activities (ACT/EMP). The work with ACT/EMP also delivered a six-step toolkit for SMEs to support business continuity, assess risk and vulnerability, and develop contingency plans.

Other activities have included courses for employers on occupational safety and health (OSH), and developing policy proposals to the government on a range of issues, including:

- fighting discrimination and protecting the most vulnerable in society;
- safeguarding essential supply chains;
- improving pandemic data management;
- reviewing transport and transit strategies;
- calling for targeted support for the most affected sectors, such as manufacturing.

Examples of collaborative work included the working group composed of COSEP, the American Chamber of Nicaragua (AMCHAM) and the Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUNIDES), supported INCAE Business School, to support the various initiatives linked to the crisis. The aim is to work across specific sectors and launch a ‘Humanitarian Assistance Fund’ to support virus prevention, treatment and mitigation initiatives.

59 Information on the work of the Nicaragua Senior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP) is available here: <https://cosep.org.ni>

## ▶ 4. Taking a lead on reputation and risk management

There has never been a more important time to take a proactive stance on reputation and crisis management. World-class strategic communication is needed more than ever to build trust and position the business community as a force for good. A fast-changing public policy environment, the pitfalls and increased scrutiny of social channels, and 24-hour media attention increase the possibility of negative developments and stories that EBMOs will be called on to manage in the future.

### Building resilience and pre-empting future risk

As we emerge from the pandemic, pre-empting and managing risk will become an increasingly important part of the EBMO playbook. As well as ensuring that the right protocols and tools – including risk registers and contingency planning – are in place within the EBMO itself, the opportunity is there to help members ramp up their own resilience and approach to risk management. Fast-changing external environments and evolving expectations will intensify the need for this kind of support. The *Changing Business* report<sup>60</sup> developed by the ILO and IOE shines the light on some of this evolving external context:

- ▶ Sixty-nine per cent of businesses recognize that increasing environmental risks have considerable impact on their operations and reputation. Worries over water, pollution and disaster risk management are part of the new normal.
- ▶ Fifty-one per cent of businesses said that policy makers are increasingly demanding compliance with environmental targets. Meeting these targets and driving overall compliance and ethics is key to the 'brand' and reputation of individual employers as well as to perceptions of business overall.
- ▶ Forty per cent and 45 per cent of firms from high-income and upper-middle-income countries, respectively, reported that their workforce is demanding more sustainable working environments and corporate values.

A core conclusion for the *Changing Business* report is that '*EBMOs will need to further adapt and innovate to help shape the future for people, businesses and society as a whole.*' A good example of this agility will be the ability to respond quickly and effectively to crisis situations. A good example of this innovation will be finding new ways of pre-empting risks so that the crisis is avoided in the first place. The focus on innovation will also be reflected in the way that EBMOs harness different communication channels and implement leading-edge advocacy campaigns that enhance the overall reputation of business across different regions and countries.

▶▶ '*EBMOs will need to further adapt and innovate to help shape the future for people, businesses and society as a whole.*'

▶ ILO/IOE *Changing Business* report

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that a number of countries are not prepared to respond effectively to an extreme crisis. The emergency quickly overwhelmed public health systems and triggered economic, financial and labour market crises in most affected countries. In general, large-scale events can also create obstacles to securing sufficient human, financial and physical resources. Global and national emergencies, climate change and black-swan events are expected to be more frequent in the future. In

<sup>60</sup> The ILO-IOE *Changing Business and Opportunities for EBMOs* report can be accessed at: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/areas-of-work/WCMS\\_679582/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/areas-of-work/WCMS_679582/lang--en/index.htm)

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this new reality, EBMOs can also play an important role to advocate for and work with governments to develop a comprehensive risk management framework based on the following pillars: (a) prevention/mitigation; (b) preparation for response; (c) advance recovery; (d) response; and (e) recovery.

► A comprehensive risk management framework*		
Action	Time period	Intended benefit/impact
Prevention/mitigation	Before the event	Reduce harm that an event could produce by averting it or minimizing its impacts
Preparation for response	Before the event	Getting ready for rapid, effective response to an event
Advance recovery	Before the event	Creating conditions that will make recovery faster, less costly, and more complete
Response	During and immediately after the event	Reducing damage in progress and minister to human needs
Recovery	After the event	Restoring social welfare as rapidly as possible

\* **Source:** Leonard, H.B. & Howitt, A.M. (2009). Acting in time against disasters: A comprehensive risk management framework. In: Kunreuther, H. & Useem, M. (eds), *Learning from catastrophes: Strategies for reaction and response*. Pearson Prentice Hall.

## Building on what has been achieved during the crisis

Upping the ante on how business is perceived and on managing negative developments are important building blocks for amplifying the voice of business. Influencing wider public opinion holds the key to influencing national governments. What are some of the barriers that need to be overcome? The word that often comes back is 'trust'. According to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer,<sup>61</sup> 56 per cent of people believe that capitalism in its current form is now doing more harm than good in the world. This once again underlines the importance for EBMOs of developing and implementing effective risk and reputation management strategies. The stakes are high and the challenge of overcoming latent pre-conceptions is a significant one.



**56 per cent of people believe that capitalism in its current form is now doing more harm than good in the world.**


EBMOs around the world have adopted an increasingly proactive approach to enhancing the overall reputation of business in their country. Showcasing the positive contribution of the business community during the course of the COVID-19 crisis has been a good example of this. As well as continuing to 'dial up the good', the opportunity is there for EBMOs to provide practical support to their members and risk management and good practice approaches to boosting their own reputation and 'employer brand'. In a constantly evolving communication and campaigning ecosystem, ongoing external support to EBMOs themselves will continue to stimulate innovative and effective approaches to managing change, risk and reputation.

61 Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>

► Based on the feedback from EBMOs and the businesses within their membership, here are five factors of change: **accelerated moves to digital delivery, specific support on new working patterns, access to unique data, access to external expertise and a platform for industry leaders to demonstrate their own thought leadership.**

## ► 5. Taking a lead on new services

What does the 'new normal' mean for the role, advocacy voice and member services delivered by EBMOs? In a disrupted and volatile economic, social and business landscape, now is the time to innovate and seize new opportunities. There is an urgency around this, with 8 out of 10 EBMOs globally reporting a drop in income according to the [ACT/EMP and IOE survey](#).<sup>62</sup> This drop was linked not only to membership fees but also to declining revenue from training, events, and legal and advisory services. Looking ahead, 77 per cent of EBMOs expect a reduction in membership in the next year.

 **8 out of 10 EBMOs globally report a drop in income, linked not only to membership fees but also to declining revenue from training, events and legal services.**

Based on the feedback from EBMOs and the businesses within their membership, here are five factors of change:

- **Accelerated moves to digital delivery** – Creating digital delivery of services and member engagement has been a priority for some time. But, there is no doubt that the COVID-19 crisis has significantly accelerated this trend. The challenge for EBMOs is to stay ahead of the curve and to access the necessary internal digital skills. Peer-to-peer exchanges between EBMO leaders across the world on digital delivery will become more important than ever.
- **Specific support on new working patterns** – A recent [survey from the Boston Consulting Group](#) shows that a substantial portion of both managers and employees think that the pace at which their companies are transitioning to digital could be faster, and employees in particular feel that they could be more involved than they are, according to the survey. A significant proportion of managers and employees – just under 50 per cent – are unsure of how the digital transformation will affect them personally when it comes to their jobs, career prospects, and pay.

62 ILO ACT/EMP and IOE survey: [https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS\\_749379/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/actemp/publications/WCMS_749379/lang--en/index.htm)

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Analysis of the activities of employer and business membership organizations in the COVID-19 pandemic and what comes next



**50 per cent of workers are unsure of how digital transformation will affect them personally when it comes to their jobs, career prospects, and pay.<sup>63</sup>**

- **Access to unique data** – In a volatile and fast-changing landscape, having access to robust data and research will be essential in helping industry leaders make strategic decisions for the future of their business. As we have seen in several of the case studies, data and thought leadership have been a core EBMO ‘offering’ to members as well as hugely important ‘positioning tool’ with government and policy makers. As companies look to make sense of the fast-changing external environment, access to unique and timely data will be a huge hook for retaining existing members and acquiring new members.
- **Access to external expertise** – Businesses need unique data; they will also need access to expertise in a wide variety of areas, including technology and AI, occupational health, sustainable flexible working patterns, workforce planning and skills mapping, recruitment and risk management. The role of EBMOs as convener is illustrated by the ‘SME Hospital’ case study from Mexico (see Case Study 20). This concept of a ‘knowledge hub’ will be increasingly important and will provide members with a tangible benefit – access to expertise in emerging priorities for their business. A collateral benefit for EBMOs is the opportunity to build a network of business partnerships will specialist suppliers that create additional revenue streams.

▀▀ *‘The world of work is reinventing itself. In this evolving landscape, representative organizations must shape future employment policies and play the role of trusted partners to policy makers, workers and businesses in building back better.’*

► **Bettina Schaller**, President, World Employment Confederation

- **A platform for industry leaders to demonstrate their own thought leadership** – According to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer,<sup>64</sup> 92 per cent of employees say that CEOs should speak out on the big issues of the day. EBMOs can provide a platform for industry leaders to engage with policy makers, to take forward their views and demonstrate their own thought leadership. This is a means of boosting personal and business brand.



**92 per cent of employees expect CEOs to speak out on the big issues of the day. EBMOs can provide the platform.**

63 Boston Consulting Group global survey. <https://www.bcg.com/en-gb/press/3july2020-digital-transformation-survey>

64 Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>

The recent [ILO/IOE survey](#)<sup>65</sup> shows 39 per cent of EBMOs reporting membership loss to date owing to the COVID-19 crisis. A further 57 per cent expect membership reductions in the next three months, 69 per cent in the next six months, and 77 per cent in the next year. Financial pressure comes not only from membership numbers but also from declining revenue from training, events and advisory services. All of this underlines the importance of taking the lead on new services and member engagement activities.

### ▶ Case Study 20 – Council of Industrial Chambers of Jalisco (CCIJ): SME Hospital

How can employers adapt to the ‘new normal’ and respond to the extreme challenges created by the pandemic? Practical business support has never been more important. Providing this is at the heart of the ‘SME Hospital’ initiative, which involved the CCIJ working in partnership with the University of Guadalajara.

The shared aim was to safeguard 30,000 businesses and over 70,000 jobs in the Jalisco region of Mexico. The SME Hospital was established as a free service to meet the urgent needs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, with advice from expert professionals in the following areas:

- ▶ finance and accounting;
- ▶ marketing;
- ▶ HR and workforce management;
- ▶ strategic planning;
- ▶ business re-engineering;
- ▶ legal and tax advice;
- ▶ leadership coaching.

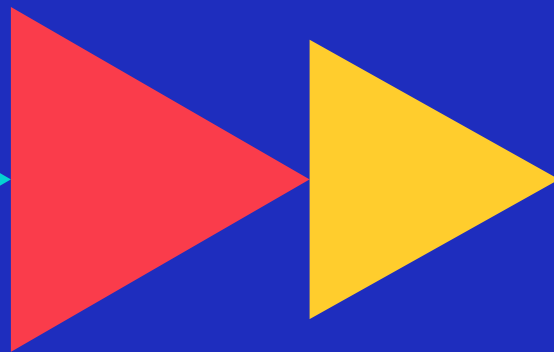
Entrepreneurs had access to a maximum of five virtual consultancy sessions covering one or more of the above topics as well as to support materials, FAQs and toolkits. The initiative is a powerful example of the role EBMOs play in providing members with access to external expertise, particularly at a time of crisis.

65 The ILO/IOE survey can be accessed here: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_749379.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_749379.pdf)

# ▶ Part 3

**Taking action:  
short- and longer-term  
priorities for action  
for EBMOs**

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# Part 3

## Taking action: short- and longer-term priorities for action for EBMOs

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We have identified a number of priority issues where EBMOs can take a lead as we move into the next phase of the COVID-19 crisis. What concrete actions can be taken forward to create positive momentum and change? Where can national governments, international institutions and social partners make the most impact? What existing initiatives can be built on and scaled up to drive economic and labour market recovery?

The feedback from EBMOs and from individual businesses (who provide the lifeblood of representative bodies through their input and membership fees) have flagged a wide range of areas where action can be prioritized. These have been collated into the four following 'action stations':

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► Looking ahead, the recovery of national economies and labour markets is wholly dependent on creating an environment in which existing businesses can go from surviving to thriving and in which new enterprises can flourish and create new jobs.

### ► 1. Maintaining and refreshing business support measures

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The debate on what a post-COVID-19 world and business landscape will look like is a live one. But we cannot lose sight of this essential point: we remain in the midst of a global pandemic that threatens public health as well as jobs, livelihoods and the survival of businesses. Many sectors remain in survival mode; the priority for EBMOs is still to help their members weather the storm and protect jobs.

The longer the crisis continues, there is a specific need to help SMEs, who need external support more than ever. From the outset of the crisis, EBMOs were at the forefront of negotiating financial packages, wage subsidies and credit schemes. Government support measures may need to be refreshed and evolve, but in most countries they are still needed. In the short term, the priority area for action for EBMOs is to make the case for ongoing support measures, including those aimed at sectors such as hospitality and tourism, where the impact of the crisis is likely to be longer lasting.

Looking ahead, the recovery of national economies and labour markets is wholly dependent on creating an environment in which existing businesses can go from surviving to thriving and in which new enterprises can flourish and create new jobs. EBMOs will be at the forefront of creating a compelling vision and roadmap for a strong economy and a vibrant labour market that provides opportunities for all.

▶▶ [...] the work of EBMOs during the height of the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted what can be achieved in terms of making an impact on the policy agenda and ensuring fast and effective collective responses to emerging challenges.

## ▶ **2. A new approach to advocacy, campaigning and political engagement**

Some EBMOs have flagged latent challenges in engaging with national governments at the right time. Others have talked of frustration with what is still seen as a tokenistic and 'tick-box' approach to engagement and consultation. At the same time, the work of EBMOs during the height of the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted what can be achieved in terms of making an impact on the policy agenda and ensuring fast and effective collective responses to emerging challenges.

How can this be built on as we look ahead to the next phase of the crisis and to a post-COVID world? Here are some calls to action:

- ▶ **Review and renew EBMO advocacy strategies** – This is a time to review current approaches to advocacy – what has worked and what hasn't? What does a COVID-impacted public policy ecosystem mean for the way EBMOs engage with national governments? This is an opportunity to think big, share ideas and innovate. International institutions like the ILO have a pivotal role to play in facilitating these peer-to-peer exchanges and creating a global platform for trialling new approaches. An ongoing priority is to actively engage members in advocacy activities; this has dual benefits of enhancing influence through the input of practitioners and industry experts and boosting retention rates (an engaged member is more likely to renew!). The case study from Malawi underlines the benefits of actively engaging industry leaders (see Case Study 21).
- ▶ **Prioritizing the high-impact issues** – As well as reviewing the how, EBMOs will need to prioritize the what. There are so many pressing topics for policy makers – what are the issues that matter most to members and where EBMOs can make the most impact? At the same time, the ambition is to take a proactive stance on issues that will drive social progress as well as business growth. How to boost impact, influence and member services without adding headcount or relying on additional revenue will be the focus of broader strategic reviews within EBMOs. Action in this area will also require external support and peer-to-peer learning.
- ▶ **Re-imagining the political engagement process** – Necessity drives innovation; the COVID-19 crisis has shown how quickly the views and ideas of the business community can be harnessed. This includes a sector-specific focus that has become increasingly important as the crisis has evolved. How can national governments enhance business engagement going forward to ensure better and evidence-based public policy decisions? How can EBMOs and industry leaders help with effective modelling and pilot schemes that trial innovative approaches? Can artificial intelligence be used to pre-empt outcomes of policy decisions? International institutions like the ILO and OECD can lead a global debate about what effective political engagement should look like in the short term and in the post-COVID-19 era.
- ▶ **Measuring impact** – As identified in the previous section, EBMOs can take a lead on priority issues that will drive economic growth and social progress in the post-COVID-19 era. These priority

areas include equality, international trade, youth employment, the future of work, automation, productivity, wellbeing, re-skilling, evolving regulations and new working patterns. EBMOs make change happen, but what measures can be used to evaluate progress? Developing new 'impact indicators' will help EBMOs to identify what works and what doesn't. This will also help to demonstrate advocacy impact to existing and potential members in a way that enhances member retention and acquisition.

### ► Case Study 21 – ECAM: Creating a new platform for industry leaders in Malawi<sup>66</sup>

The Employers' Consultative Association of *Malawi* (ECAM) formed a CEO platform as part of a new strategy for Malawi's leading employers' organization, with an increasing focus on advocacy and using the collective voice of industry leaders to influence policy development. The aim is to bring business leaders together to work closely with HR specialists on ECAM's regular board to ramp up impact with government, other politicians and labour unions, and create a better business climate in the country.

The COVID-19 crisis hit very soon after the new initiative was launched, but the CEO platform has stepped up to this 'baptism of fire' and has been influential in limiting economic damage and plotting a way forward for the country's economy. The CEOs involved represent a section of key sectors, including telecommunications, financial services and food manufacturing. The CEO platform is strictly politically neutral, the aim being to proactively underline the importance of a good business climate for society as a whole.

### ► From taking a lead to taking action: Measuring impact

EBMOs make change happen, but what measures can be used to set targets and evaluate progress? Achieving policy changes is the most obvious outcome, but other indicators can be used to measure recognition for the voice and influence of EBMOs. Based on activities that have already delivered measurable results, below are examples of 'impact indicators':

- representation on government forums and advisory groups;
- government officials engaging directly with EBMO members;
- tangible evidence of policy changes achieved;
- increased broadcast and print media coverage for core campaigning messages;
- stakeholder audits, tracking external perceptions of advocacy influence;
- member surveys, tracking internal perceptions of advocacy influence;
- level of member engagement in EBMO advocacy and campaigning activities;
- creation of bespoke 'influence metrics' to track outcomes from interactions with government and stakeholders.

66 An overview of ECAM services for businesses in Malawi can be accessed here: <https://www.ecammw.com/ecam-services/>

▶▶ There has never been a more important time to take a proactive stance on reputation management. [...] The challenge for EBMOs is maintaining a focus on proactive campaigning and positioning activities while having to react to fast-changing external landscape.

### ▶ **3. Driving a proactive approach to enhancing the reputation of business**

There has never been a more important time to take a proactive stance on reputation management.

As part of this, world-class strategic communication is needed more than ever to build trust and position the business community as a force for good. The challenge for EBMOs is maintaining a focus on proactive campaigning and positioning activities while having to react to fast-changing external landscape. The fact that 92 per cent<sup>67</sup> of employees believe that business leaders should speak out on the big issues of the day underlines the opportunities to position the voice of industry at the forefront of pressing social as well as economic issues.

EBMOs can take action by not only focusing on the communication challenge inherent in boosting the reputation of business, but also by focusing on the substance of how businesses behave and comply with regulatory obligations and ethical norms. Specific calls to action include:

- ▶ **Dialling up the good** – EBMOs are already leading proactive campaigns on the positive contribution of businesses in their countries. Collating examples of the private sector's collaboration with government and support to local communities forms part of this. Looking ahead, the opportunity is there for EBMOs to make a positive impact on the reputation of business through innovative ways of showcasing the role of the private sector in driving social progress and taking action on the post-COVID-19 policy priorities identified.
- ▶ **Focusing on the 'how'** – Learning from each other and from external experts will enable EBMOs to adopt leading-edge communication, reputation and crisis management strategies. The opportunity now is to build on past experience to reposition the role and contribution of the private sector in the post-COVID-19 era. The initial action is to review channels, messages, media strategies and internal skills and create a further step-change in external communication capability.
- ▶ **Focusing on the 'what'** – Taking action on the reputation of business is not just about better communication. It is not a cosmetic marketing exercise; it requires action on the substance of business ethics and behaviour. Help is needed. For example, 95 per cent of respondents to a recent survey of over 3,000 companies in Latin America<sup>68</sup> said that bribery remained common practice in their country. Over 63 per cent were not aware of mechanisms they could set up in their companies

67 Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>

68 First Latin American Report on Business Practices Against Bribery – 3,000 companies surveyed in seven countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru). Further information can be accessed at: <https://www.uexternado.edu.co/administracion-de-empresas/presentacion-del-primer-estudio-latinoamericano-sobre-el-estado-de-las-practicas-empresariales-contra-el-soborno/>

to address bribery and corruption, and only 15 per cent had any form of in-house training on the issue. Capacity development efforts from supporting organizations for EBMOs can make a difference by championing transparent contracting and effective enforcement, promoting ethical supply chains and addressing corruption.

### ► Case Study 22 – ECOP<sup>69</sup>: Taking action on reputation and crisis management in the Philippines

The Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP) hosted a series of webinars for EBMOs and leading employers in the Philippines on the [Fundamentals on Reputation and Crisis Management](#).<sup>70</sup> There has never been a more important time to review current risk management procedures as well as opportunities to boost influence and employer brand through a proactive approach to reputation management.

The online course – delivered by the ILO International Training Centre (ITCILO) – focused on the following priorities for representative bodies and for the business leaders within their membership:

- developing world-class risk management procedures, including risk registers and contingency planning;
- leading proactive reputation management strategies that boost employer and consumer brand;
- boosting internal skills and harnessing external expertise to respond to crisis scenarios and implement proactive campaigns;
- reviewing strategic communication and media activities;
- measuring progress and driving continuous improvement in risk and reputation management.

ECOP's focus on creating learning opportunities for members is reflected in its recently launched e-Campus, which offers a range of courses and programmes in full online or blended formats – developed in partnership with the ITCILO. The platform is also a repository of learning materials and includes an online messaging system that enables participants to engage with each other to share views and examples of good practice.

69 Information on the work of ECOP in the Philippines can be accessed here: <https://ecop.org.ph>

70 An outline of the ECOP programme on reputation and crisis management is at: <https://ecop.org.ph/event/fundamentals-on-reputation-and-crisis-management/>

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▶▶ The challenge for many EBMOs is a perennial one: how to position the voice of business at the forefront of an increasing range of pressing social and economic issues, while simultaneously leading proactive campaigns and ramping up practical support to members.

## ▶ 4. Harnessing practical tools and support models to boost EBMO impact and performance

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The challenge for many EBMOs is a perennial one: how to position the voice of business at the forefront of an increasing range of pressing social and economic issues, while simultaneously leading proactive campaigns and ramping up practical support to members. And all this with flat or diminishing revenues and limited resources! Making any kind of step-change within this context relies on harnessing external support and practical tools in a way that enhances capacity and impact in a cost-effective and time-efficient way.

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▶▶ *‘Business continuity planning has been a fundamental tool for businesses. It is a tool to mitigate impact and ensure early recovery.’*

▶ **Jennifer Ula-Fruean**, President of the Samoa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI)

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▶▶ *‘To fight the pandemic, we all have to look in the same direction, and to help the most vulnerable people, while counting on the support of the WHO and ILO to reach these objectives.’*

▶ **Alexander Furlan**, Vice President of the Brazilian National Confederation of Industry

A good example of this kind of support is the use of practical research and data tools made available to EBMOs through ILO ACT/EMP. As well as providing a means of generating bespoke data, the tool

facilitates the presentation and 'packaging-up' of the findings in a way that maximizes impact while saving significant time and budget for the EBMO. Taking the pulse of what is happening in the private sector and using this evidence base to support key asks to government has never been more important. This is just one area where practical support and user-friendly tools can help EBMOs scale up activities despite capacity and resourcing restrictions.

As well as feeding into the debate around how businesses can harness artificial intelligence (AI) and new technology to drive productivity, EBMOs will need to take a view on how tech-driven innovation can benefit their own service delivery. For example, can AI be used to segment the membership according to differing needs? These are longer-term priorities, but the development of practical tools and innovative approaches that can enhance the delivery of services in a cost-effective manner will become increasingly important.

Using peer-to-peer networks and providing access to global experts will also ensure that EBMOs have the infrastructure needed to thrive in the 21st century. Reviewing what works best in terms of capacity-building models and increased regional cooperation will form part of this. The new approach to business support being taken forward in the Pacific Islands is a good example of innovation and collaboration (see Case Study 23).

### ▶ Case Study 23 – Building capacity through enhanced cooperation in the Pacific Islands<sup>71</sup>

In September 2020 ITC-ILO and ILO ACT/EMP concluded a [cooperation agreement with the Pacific Island Private Sector Organization \(PIPSO\)](#) to promote a more structured, strategic and sustainable approach to capacity-building of EBMOs in the Pacific Islands. The agreement follows on from the historic meeting in 2019 between ILO Director-General Guy Ryder and employer representatives from all 11 ILO member states and their regional platform (PIPSO) to discuss priorities and concerns for the private sector in the Pacific.

Formally recognizing PIPSO as the regional body to represent employers provides a means of improving the accessibility and availability of the ITC capacity-building programmes. The agreement covers specific areas, such as an assessment of needs and infrastructure, and the development of a regional framework for capacity-building. As part of this, training will be provided to increase EBMO capacity to perform and deliver services in the areas of:

- ▶ reputation and crisis management;
- ▶ lobbying and advocacy;
- ▶ membership strategies for EBMOs;
- ▶ strategic financial management;
- ▶ productivity.

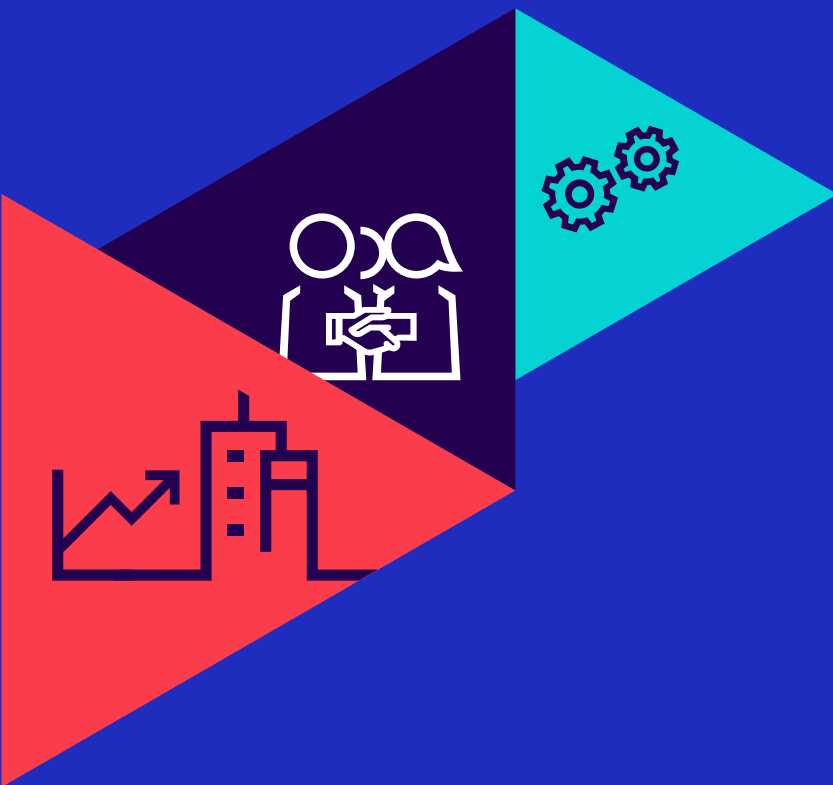
The importance of effective partnerships and of targeted support to the business community have been recurring themes since the start of the COVID-19 crisis. The PIPSO Cooperation Agreement signals a positive step forward in both these areas. The shared mission is to build strong and representative organizations that support good policy outcomes, which in turn create employment and improve living standards in the Pacific region.

<sup>71</sup> Details on the cooperation agreement in the Pacific Islands is available here: [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_754874/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_754874/lang--en/index.htm)

# ▶ Final thoughts

Seven traits for successful transition

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► Crises, such as COVID-19, often bring lasting change and drive innovation. For EBMOs this will involve being prepared to challenge existing models and knowing where to go for external support and new approaches.

## Final thoughts: Seven traits for successful transition

The so-called 'new normal' means different things to different audiences and presents a blurry vision of what we can expect in the future. We have used this terminology only sparingly in this report. One thing that is crystal clear is that EBMOs will continue to play a pivotal role in helping businesses and policy makers manage urgent responses to the evolving crisis as well as in building a vision and platform for inclusive post-pandemic economies and labour markets.

There are no final conclusions to be drawn at this time – how can you conclude on an external tapestry that is in constant transition? What we can do is reflect on how EBMOs around the world have responded to extreme disruption. This agility and adaptability provides a strong legacy as we approach the twin priorities of weathering the ongoing tumult while laying the foundations for building back better.

Crises, such as COVID-19, often bring lasting change and drive innovation. For EBMOs this will involve being prepared to challenge existing models and knowing where to go for external support and new approaches. Retrenchment would be the worst possible response; the multilateral mindset being promoted on the global level will also serve the work of EBMOs on a national level – it sets the tone for an openness of mind, for an acceptance of change, for peer-to-peer exchanges, and for harnessing external input in a way that will deliver a sustainable and successful future.

Based on the aggregated insight from EBMOs from around the world, here are the seven traits for successful transition that will help manage short-term challenges and seize future opportunities:

- 1. Learning to live with uncertainty** – The pandemic will be with us for some time still. The public health debate will run in parallel to the forward-looking agenda around recovery and building back better. EBMOs will continue to play a pivotal role in helping businesses and policy makers manage urgent responses to the evolving health crisis and its impact on national economies and employment. In the short term, the role of EBMOs will be essential in helping businesses, workers and wider society live with COVID-19.
- 2. Taking a breath** – EBMOs are responding to the needs of members and to the evolving external landscape with absolute urgency. The pace is unrelenting. But it will be vital to take a breath, to create some space, to reflect and to assess the impact and legacies of the crisis. How will member needs evolve? What's next in terms of advocacy and asks of government? International institutions

have a pivotal role to play in facilitating this stock-take and exchanges between EBMOs as part of the 'reset' process.

- 3. Nurturing a future-focused mindset** – The collective aim is not to simply go back to the pre-crisis work; the 'building back better' mantra exemplifies a more ambitious future vision. For EBMOs this means being prepared to challenge existing models, re-imagining and diversifying services to members and accelerating digitalization. It also means being at the forefront of building a vision and platform for inclusive post-pandemic economies and labour markets.
- 4. Making trade-offs** – At the time of writing, it is impossible to predict when the health crisis will finally subside. But EBMOs can focus on what they *can* control: providing progressive solutions to evolving public policy priorities and responsive services to members. Delivering this with finite resources will require EBMOs to make trade-offs and prioritize the right areas. The latest feedback indicates that high-impact virtual communication and digitalized services are at the top of the list.
- 5. Spreading the word** – Over the course of the crisis, dynamic and creative EBMOs have increased their visibility, convening power and advocacy impact. At a time of shifting priorities and rampant uncertainty, this is a solid platform to build on. The priority is to learn from what has worked, to showcase specific examples and to use this to reaffirm the positive role that EBMOs play, not just within the business and public policy arena, but across wider society.
- 6. Harnessing external support** – The over-riding challenge is to do more with less. This will require unshakeable resilience and astute resource mobilization strategies within EBMOs. Drawing on external guidance and support has never been more important. Paradigms are shifting, with an increasing demand for highly practical support that can make an immediate impact – for example global guides and tools that can be customized to meet the national needs of EBMOs. In the same way that individual businesses are recognizing the importance of external expertise and strong networks, EBMOs need their own support infrastructure more than ever.
- 7. Unleashing the power of purpose** – The crisis has provided a reminder of why collective voice matters, and of the crucial role that EBMOs play as advocates for the private sector, as critical friends to government, as convenors and as conduits for peer-to-peer learning. With so much focus on a new social contract, on ethics and reputation, on reviewing priorities and on reinventing the way that we measure and define successful economies, the opportunity is there for EBMOs to evolve from being the voice of business to being the soul of business. Absolute clarity of purpose is the compass; this will lead EBMOs through the crisis and towards a sustainable future.

EBMOs are not immune to the forces of disruption; adapting to rapid and unrelenting change was already a priority in the 'old normal'. The COVID-19 crisis has intensified the need for new solutions to pre-existing challenges, including evolving members' expectations, delivering high-impact advocacy and creating communication cut-through in an 'age of noise'. A radical rethink of traditional EBMO business models will be vital for future sustainability. This is where external support will be more important than ever, with organizations like ACT/EMP taking on a role of 'transformation partners' to EBMOs. As well as revisiting existing delivery models, the way ahead will involve diversifying member services and repositioning the business voice around the world.

The stakes are high and it is in everybody's interest to see EBMOs evolve and thrive. 400 million full-time jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020 according to ILO estimates; we need a strong and vibrant private sector to create new employment opportunities for all. Strong and vibrant EBMOs will be at the heart of the economic and jobs market reboots. Looking ahead, 85 million jobs will be displaced and 97 million jobs will be added by 2025, according to the recent [World Economic Forum 'Future of Jobs' report](https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report)<sup>72</sup>. Agile and future-focused businesses will thrive by pre-empting evolving skills needs. Agile and future-focused EBMOs will facilitate this and will be at the forefront of the future of work agenda.

<sup>72</sup> The World Economic Forum 'Future of Jobs' report can be accessed at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020>

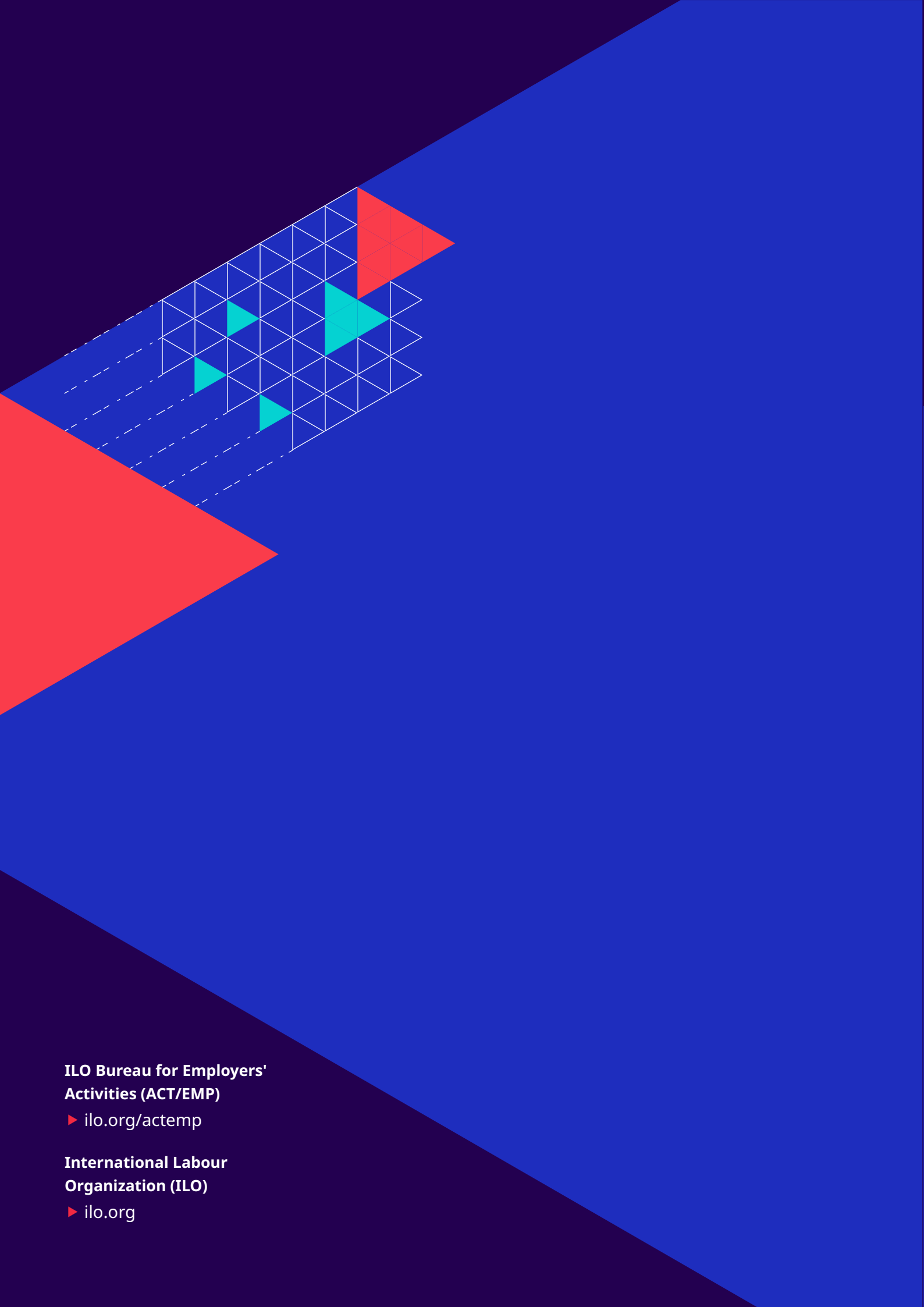
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►► A radical rethink of traditional EBMO business models will be vital for future sustainability. This is where external support will be more important than ever, with organizations like ACT/EMP taking on a role of ‘transformation partners’ to EBMOs.

The Seven Traits for Successful Transition underline the size of the challenge and the need to balance parallel priorities for EBMOs:

- Address immediate priorities with absolute urgency while building the platform for long-term sustainability.
- Look inwards to take stock of lessons learned and create space for self-reflection, while looking outwards for new ideas and external support.
- Make trade-offs but stay true to a clear underlying purpose.

Adaptability to change is the golden thread. The survival instincts and agility that EBMOs have honed during the crisis are building blocks for bouncing back fitter, leaner and more able than ever to drive social innovation, inclusive growth as well as a competitive and sustainable environment for private enterprise.



**ILO Bureau for Employers'  
Activities (ACT/EMP)**

▶ [ilo.org/actemp](https://ilo.org/actemp)

**International Labour  
Organization (ILO)**

▶ [ilo.org](https://ilo.org)