

# THE EAST AFRICAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION



COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT- COVID -19

## Introduction

As the global Corona pandemic continues to rage the world, cases of infected people continue to rise in the region, with a significant number of deaths also being registered in some EAC Partner States. As of 24th November 2020, 96,703 confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported in EAC, Uganda with 16,257 active cases and 150 death; 70,804 confirmed cases in Kenya, with 46,244 recoveries and 1,287 death; 5,491 confirmed cases in Rwanda, with 5,004 recoveries and 45 death; Burundi 630 cases reported, with 549 recoveries and 1 death; South Sudan 3,012 confirmed cases, 1,290 recoveries and 59 death; and the United Republic of Tanzania last reported its Corona cases in May, with 509 confirmed cases, 183 recoveries and 21 death. The EAC Partner States continues to have hundreds of people under observation and more contacts being traced in affected regions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an impact on the East African Community (EAC) economies both directly and indirectly as a result of the measures being taken currently to contain the spread of the disease. Realizing that the spread of COVID-19 was mainly through travel, several measures were imposed. These include closing of airports and borders, curfews, social distancing necessitating the need to stay at home, reduction on movement and lock-downs. The closure of businesses has led to a near collapse of the air travel industry, tourism and hospitality, agriculture, livestock and fisheries, industry and manufacturing, trade and distribution, cargo and passenger transport and logistics as well as the banking and other financial services sectors. The net result is unemployment, food insecurity and economic slow-down with a risk of total collapse if the situation is not arrested.

The East African Trade Union Confederation (EATUC) continues to respond strongly to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. All trade union members and citizens in East Africa have a major stake in managing the spread and contribute significantly to reduce the impact of COVID-19 in our region.

It is against this backdrop therefore that EATUC with support from DTDA has managed to carry out a comprehensive assessment from its members to assess the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the trade union responses to the pandemic. The assessment was conducted to all six EATUC's members.

## **Tanzania Mainland**

Tanzania has confirmed the first case of COVID -19 in March 2020. On 17th March 2020 the government has decided to close down all education centres/universities, secondary and primary schools. To date the reopening schedule has been done with effect from 1st June 2020 to high school and universities and on 29th June 2020 the secondary and primary schools reopened.

In May 2020 was the last time the government to report COVID -19 pandemic updates, by then about 488 were victims and 16 deaths were put in records with more than 300 recoveries. The Pandemic has affected several sectors in Tanzania leaving some employees jobless including Tourism/hospitality industry, aviation and informal economy workers. There is no lockdown or curfew practiced in Tanzania.

## **TUCTA Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

TUCTA has been at the fore front in protecting workers during this time of COVID-19 pandemic particularly in discussing all matters pertaining workers status during this cause including their privileges and rights.

TUCTA has come up with position paper describing essential tools that employers MUST offer to employees without distracting working environments, no constructive terminations to be done without two parties having discussed and agreed the modality, protective gears provided to all workers etc.

Social dialogue structure in place has enabled TUCTA to engage government and employers on how best to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. The so called Labour Economic Social Council (LESCO) has been an instrument to dialogue in various matters.

Unions have been providing supports and public education for self -protection and to their members who have been heavily affected by this pandemic by called upon employers to provide better working environment( Provide PPEs, sanitizers, etc) also if possible to allow them to stay and work from home

## Rwanda

The first COVID-19 case in Rwanda was confirmed by the government in March 2020. The Government has taken timely and appropriate measures in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Rwanda, including suspending all activities causing mass gathering, and allowing only essential services; lockdown measures, social distancing and properly washing hands and there is improvement in containing COVID-19 pandemic.

On May 1st Rwanda announced new measures easing the nationwide lockdown to revive the country's economy. The new measures have allowed public and private businesses to resume work with essential staff while other employees remain working from home. The markets were opening for essential vendors not exceeding 50% of registered traders. Hotels and restaurants operate and close by 7 pm. Meetings and mass gatherings were also strictly prohibited. Borders will remain closed except for cargo. Schools will remain closed until September 2020 as well as worship places, bars and recreation centres.

According to numbers indicated by the ministry of health in Rwanda, total cases in early July was 1821 active cases, more than 918 have recovered from the virus, and 5 cases of death has recently been reported.

It has been noticeable that some jobs are still suspended especially for workers in informal economy based on their category of work; they earn their pay on work done on a daily basis mainly in cities. CESTRAR therefore appreciates the government initiative of distributing food and sanitary items for the less privileged including those workers in informal economy.

As it has been manifested, the consequences are already remarkable in big, small and medium companies, private schools and many institutions having permanent employees. For this reason, some of those companies have already started temporarily suspending employment contracts, or sending employees into forced annual leave, or some unilaterally decide to reduce the salaries with no prior dialogue and negotiation between employer and workers representatives in order to find an appropriate solution. As workers organisation, CESTRAR is very much concerned that these problems are more likely to increase in many companies and thus causing more Labour disputes.

These massive workers suspension activities do only increase the number of victims especially that they are not being done in observance of procedures provided in Labour Law in Rwanda.

On the other hand, the implementation of lockdown measures has placed a major distress on the country's food value-chains, particularly businesses in the agricultural sector. Research done by Rwandese economists on the indicative socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on Rwanda predicts that, despite the measures taken by the government to curb the spread of the virus and the discipline of Rwandan citizens, the agriculture sector and international trade will be negatively affected. SMEs are expected to be even more affected, yet they are a main source of livelihoods for most Rwandans.

### **CESTRAR Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

First, CESTRAR supports the measures taken by the government and called for even more possible effort at providing public awareness to help combat the pandemic. CESTRAR has been able to create awareness through TVs, social media platforms, and providing campaign materials like flyers to other union for workers to continue preventing the covid-19 outbreak

CESTRAR encouraged the government to continue undertaking emergency in public health infrastructure including sanitation and hygiene in particular ensuring public access to potable water to facilitate public cleanliness; CESTRAR has also called upon employers to institute measures that restrict the spread of the virus through allowing flexibility of workers to work from home where possible.

Through social dialogue dimension, CESTRAR recognizes the vital role of Employers and Workers' organizations in crisis response as it calls on these organizations to ensure business continuity and to assist workers in recovering from the crisis through training, advice and material support. It has advocated for measures to be taken through collective bargaining as well as other methods of social dialogue

Currently CESTRAR has received support from its partners and has been able to provide some PPE materials to workers like masks, sanitizers, gloves. CESTRAR is also implementing activities that are aimed at supporting workers who have been laid off through assistance and mediation, providing legal assistance to workers whose contracts have been temporarily terminated, Advocacy of workers that are at the frontline especially health workers, cleaners.

## Kenya

On 13th March 2020 the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Kenya. As of 5th June 2020 there were 2,474 cases, 643 recoveries and 79 deaths. The government has implemented several measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 by restricted travel from any countries with COVID-19, all schools and higher learning institutions closed in March 2020, government and businesses start working from home except essential services, cashless transactions over cash and cost of transaction reduced, no congregational meetings- weddings, malls, night clubs, churches, mosques, limitation of visits to hospitals, shopping malls and hospitals to give soap and water/hand sanitizers and regular cleaning of facilities.

The public health system is strained on human and capital resources. For instance, there are insufficient medical personnel especially at the community level who can offer basic health services like preventive information. As at 30th April, there were only 518 ICU beds a number which is critically low in case of mass infections. Healthcare workers are also experiencing inadequate safety and protective equipment exposing them to infection at work.

As of 13th May 2020 about 1,000,000 jobs lost in the informal economy, 200,000 jobs lost in the formal sector and unidentified number of formal workers on unpaid leave since April. Most affected sectors include; agriculture especially flower, tea and coffee industry, tourism (tourist & hospitality industry), transport (both road and air) and education.

### **COTU-K Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

COTU-K has participated in advocating for fair industrial relations with social partners a forum convened by the Ministry of Labour. The COTU (K) developed a position paper on the impact of Covid-19 and recommendations which culminated into a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding. The key issue advocated for is job security/ income guarantee and occupational safety and health.

Through existing social dialogue structures, COTU is engaging both government and employers. COTU-K supports workers affected by Covid-19 include by engaging with employers and government for policy review (e.g reduction of income tax) and resolving disputes such as unfair dismissal, advocating for safe work conditions and provision of PPEs- COTU-K providing PPEs especially masks and sanitizers to front-line workers

The COTU-K and its affiliate unions are mainly using social media to sensitize workers on preventive measures and other work arrangements. Other modes include use of existing structures such as branch offices and shop floors union representatives to communicate to members.

The COTU-K proposed tax relief (which was effected) and rent waiver (yet to be implemented). Other proposals have been provision of safe working environment including work-from home option and provision of PPEs. To cushion SMEs and the informal economy workers, COTU-K has proposed provision of cheap credit to cushion businesses from total collapse. Measures taken by Kenya government like partial lockdown; dawn-dust curfew and travel restriction are good but not sufficient. For instance, informal workers are forced to violate such directives and continue with movement and businesses since they have no alternate livelihood support. If all workers are guaranteed of basic income

## Uganda

On 22nd March 2020 the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Uganda. The government suspended for 32 days with immediate effect public gatherings places of worship, pubs, weddings, music shows, rallies and culture meetings. Foreigners and Ugandans arrived in the country were staying in 14-day mandatory quarantine in hotels designated by the government that are in Entebbe under condition that the costs of accommodation paid by citizens themselves. When reported in June there were 431 new cases and 706 recoveries, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 889, the total number of recovered patients to 819 and the number of active cases at the end of the month to 70.

Corona virus has led to employment loss in all the sectors since Uganda is on the total lock down. However, the sectors below are highly affected.

- Aviation
- General transport since public transport was burnt
- Tourism that is hotel and national parks and tour and travel companies.
- Horticulture (flower firms)
- Education sector for private schools, tertiary institutions and universities
- Informal economy since are in a total lockdown

## **NOTU Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

NOTU and FUE issued a bipartite statement on Covid19 to show their commitment and recognition of the impact of COVID-19 on enterprises and business operations. Unions have been in negotiation with employers on covid-19 agreements; hotel sector has been achieved to have an agreement. Unions have raised awareness through media and trade union structures exist.

## **Zanzibar**

Zanzibar has confirmed the first case of COVID -19 in March 2020. The government has decided to close down all education centres/universities, secondary and primary schools. On 7th May, it was announced that for Zanzibar, the cumulative total of recorded cases was 134, the cumulative number of recoveries was 16 and the cumulative numbers of recorded deaths was 5. The Unguja Island is the mostly affected while only 23 cases are confirmed in sister island Pemba. From June the reopening schedule of University, Secondary and Primary schools has been done

There is huge impact of the Corona virus on employment in Zanzibar while the country main economic sector is Hospitality Industry. The sector contributes more than 80% of foreign currency income of the government and employs about 90% of the private sector employees, all hotels were closed so the services have stopped and the employees lost their jobs by redundancy, job cuts, and termination of contract or unpaid leave. Also there is inadequate health facilities in terms of the spaces and equipment in hospitals which lead to open alternative temporary hospitals in schools and public buildings to be used for COVID-19 patients, no enough health staff like doctors and nurses, the government has decided to bring back staff who were in leave, in trainings and who have been retired.

## **ZATUC Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

ZATUC is among the members of the national response team and sectorial COVID-19 response team through Ministry of Labour and its roles is to sensitize workers and employers in complying with government and healthcare experts' directives in preventing themselves and others against COVID-19, also in ensuring the workers' rights are protected. Most of unions provide the technical support to workers by representing them in negotiation table due to job cut, termination of employment and redundancy so that employees are not losing their jobs. Unions have been providing protective materials to the workers at work places and health education on how to prevent COVID-19 pandemic.



ZATUC has issued many formal statement and developed media programs in Radio and Television regarding the Covid-19 which cover the following topics among others:-

- How to prevent Corona at work places
- Corona and employment
- Impact of Corona to economy
- Importance of social dialogue in minimizing COVID-19 impact

Through social dialogue structure in place ZATUC has been engaging government and employers on how best to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Burundi**

Burundi has confirmed the first case of COVID -19 in March 2020. In July there were 217 new cases, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 387. The death toll remained one. The number of recovered patients increased by 189 to 304, leaving 82 active cases at the end of the month, COVID 19 pandemic has affected transport sector, hotels and restaurants, commercial and informal economy. Lack of testing kits and material of protection, no enough space and human resource to take care of the patients are challenges faced by Burundi in fighting COVID-19 pandemic.

## **COSYBU Response on COVID-19 Pandemic**

COSYBU has issued formal statement regarding the Covid-19 by requested the government to make in place tripartite commission to deal with the impact of the COVID-19.

## **EATUC Observations/ Recommendations on COVID-19 Pandemic**

The impact of COVID-19 on production of goods and services has been felt with companies scaling down on production or closing entirely to adhere to the strict guidelines from their respective health ministries or with no business at all. This has affected workers income, demand and supply chain and general market conditions and labour market negatively.

EATUC observes that workers have been on frontline fighting the COVID-19 crisis in East Africa and they have been the first casualties. This has been due to the lack of or poor implementation of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) standards at their places of work. The advent of COVID-19 has exposed the challenges in implementation of OHS in the transport sector, the taxis, bodaboda, daladala and matatus. It begs answers as to how these workers who remain vulnerable and are protected from highly infectious disease are expected to protect their passengers from transmission?

EATUC recommends that East Africa states should not wait for a pandemic for them to start enforcing OHS. The Occupational Health and Safety should be a natural requirement within transport and labour ministries ensuring enforcement just as other workplaces. The transport sector needs to have occupational health and safety committees to ensure implementation of OHS standards and to troubleshoot any matter that relates to OHS and how best to put it in practice.

EATUC emphasises on constructive and persistent social dialogue between government and social partners. Trade unions and employers organizations have a role to play as they contribute greatly through tripartite social dialogue between governments, workers and employers organizations. This is a key tool for developing and implementing sustainable solutions from the community level to regional level.

EATUC notes that as many governments scramble to pay for sick leave, provide income support or other measures, they have found themselves putting in place the building blocks of social contracts. As such a new social contract is vital to set the regional back on a sustainable and just a path. The term of this contract must include a social protection floor for all workers with fundamental rights adequate minimum wage, maximum working hours, and health and safety. The paid sick leave, carer's leave and other entitlements should be guaranteed through legislative guarantee or collective bargaining.

The informal economy is the back-bone of East Africa and to a large extent all African economies. EATUC with a membership of over 4.5 million members, the trade unions have managed to only organize less than 600,000 members from the informal economy. This makes it a challenge to mainstream and extend OHS through OHS committees and awareness building at work place.

There is need for governments to support the informal economy to cushion their business during the on-going slump. This might require social protection incentives such as cash grants to replace incomes which are key during this critical time. Such incentives give informal economy workers greater financial freedom during the restrictions put in place. Without government support, a sector that contributes over 50% to the GDP and employs over 70% of people in East Africa is at the verge of collapse if the issues surrounding the informal sector workers OHS and incentives to ensure that their business bounce back are not addressed.

Governments in East Africa are putting measures to protect workers against COVID-19. Most businesses have closed while others are operating with minimal activities. However there is need to go beyond this and enact legislations and policies that will see to it that all workers including those working in the informal economy. EAC partner states should ratify and implement the relevant ILO conventions (Conv.190 on violence and harassment at workplace and Conv.189 on domestic workers) that offer a framework in protecting workers in the informal economy. Trade unions should play a key role in awareness building and campaigns for ratification. Further they should do more work in organizing the informal economy and helping in giving them voice to speak on their plight and how best they can be supported.

## Annex 1: What options are available to support workers' welfare and income security during the crisis?

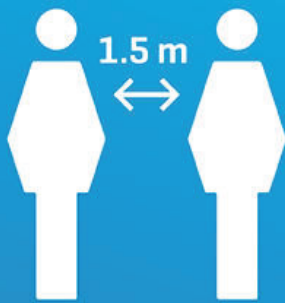
Countries	Tanzania Mainland	Zanzibar	Burundi	Rwanda
Is sick leave for workers granted?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Is there wage support?	No	No	No	No
Is there any tax exemption? (For SMEs/ low-wage workers)	To some extent (only tax reduction)	No	—	Tax development as of may include; suspension of tax audits generally has been put on hold for a period of 30 days. For tax payers seeking for amicable settlements for their tax obligation arising from audits, the tax authority has waived the down payment requirements of the outstanding tax liability that ought to be paid. Large tax payers filing deadline has been extended by 15 days. SM tax payers have been granted an extension of one month
Is there income support (for those without incomes)?	No	No	—	No
Is there food support (For those whose movements are restricted or facing lockdowns)?	Tanzania had no Lock down	ZATUC has already submitted to the government the proposal on some of mentioned measures like Wage support, income support, Tax exemptions , food support and re-employment guarantee	—	Yes
Is there formal reemployment guarantee to workers upon recovery?	To date no records to be declared	No	—	No

## Annex 1: What options are available to support workers' welfare and income security during the crisis?

Countries	Kenya	Uganda
Is sick leave for workers granted?	Yes. Sick leave is provided in line existing Employment Act(7 days full pay and next 7 days on half pay)	Yes
Is there wage support?	Yes. The MOU has allowed distressed employers and workers to negotiate for measures such as unpaid leave but with guarantee of job security	No
Is there any tax exemption? (For SMEs/ low-wage workers)	Yes. Tax exemption is in form of; a2% reduction of Turn Over Tax on SMEs, 100% tax relief for workers earning up to \$240 and 5% reduction on other employee's income and corporate tax respectively. The other is a 2% reduction in value added tax on essential goods.	No
Is there income support (for those without incomes)?	Yes. The government has expanded the existing cash transfer program for the elderly, vulnerable children and persons with severe disability. A small number of vulnerable urban poor are also receiving a weekly stipend of \$50.	No
Is there food support (For those whose movements are restricted or facing lockdowns?)	Yes. The government has expanded the existing cash transfer program for the elderly, vulnerable children and persons with severe disability. A small number of vulnerable urban poor are also receiving a weekly stipend of \$50.	There is food support to the vulnerable poor
Is there formal reemployment guarantee to workers upon recovery?	Yes. The tripartite MOU guarantees re-employment of infected workers upon recovery	To some companies but to only about 15% of the workers

## Annex II. Preventive Measures for COVID-19

**ALWAYS KEEP A DISTANCE  
OF 1.5 M FROM OTHERS**



**WEAR A FACE  
MASK WHERE  
REQUIRED**



**WASH YOUR HANDS REGULARLY  
AND THOROUGHLY WITH SOAP**



**SNEEZE AND COUGH IN  
THE CROOK OF YOUR ARM**



**KEEP YOUR HANDS  
AWAY FROM YOUR FACE**



**DO NOT SHAKE  
HANDS**

