



International
Labour
Organization

ILO Helpdesk for Business

Update report on the expert advice service and web site
March 2021



ILO PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE COMPANIES WITH EXPERT ADVICE ON THE REALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS AND THE MNE DECLARATION

Update report March 2021¹

The ILO Helpdesk for Business was established by the ILO Governing Body in 2007² and is one of the operational tools of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration). Since 2009 the Helpdesk answers individual questions on the application of the principles contained in international labour standards to company operations and the provisions of the MNE Declaration. The free and confidential service is operated by the Multinational and Enterprises Engagement Unit (MULTI).

The largest groups of users of the individual assistance service are companies, workers and their representatives and CSR initiatives (industry and multi-stakeholder). However, the Helpdesk has also assisted other groups, in particular inter-governmental organizations (mainly those concerned with trade, development and human rights), government agencies (concerning, e.g., development aid, procurement, export promotion, import requirements, CSR policies and national action plans on business and human rights) and employers' organizations. Other users include NGOs, journalists, consultants and academic researchers.

In October 2010 the Office launched the [Helpdesk for Business website](#) to provide a one-stop-shop for information, practical tools and upcoming training opportunities that are relevant to companies. It also posts answers to questions received that may be of interest to other users.³ The Office regularly updates the web site with new materials; for instance, a special COVID-19 section was quickly created in 2020 to assist companies to locate relevant ILO tools and guidance concerning company responses to the pandemic. The website is available in English, French and Spanish; mirror sites exist in Japanese and Chinese and key pages were translated in Vietnamese.

The Office actively promotes the Helpdesk for Business. The service can be accessed through the [homepage of the ILO website](#) and is cross-linked from several ILO thematic, department and project pages. The Office encourages constituents to use the Helpdesk as part of the promotional activities of the MNE Declaration. The ILO International Training Centre in Turin also distributes promotional materials during relevant trainings. A promotional leaflet on the ILO Helpdesk exists in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Myanmar, Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese and is widely distributed among constituents and enterprises and partners. Other ILO departments and programmes also promote the service, notably [NORMES](#).

¹ The Office produces an annual report for the tripartite Governing Body Advisory Committee. The reporting period covers the period 1 March - 28 February, to allow for a comparison over the years as well as to compile cumulative totals. This report covers the period 1 March 2020 - 28 February 2021.

² GB.298/PV, para. 248.

³ Posted questions may be modified to preserve confidentiality.

Various ILO development cooperation projects that work with companies promote the Helpdesk. For instance, the EU-ILO-OECD [Responsible Supply Chains in Asia](#) project, covering six countries in Asia (China, Japan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam; 2018-2020) produced a publication on “Labour Issues in CSR: Examples from the ILO Helpdesk for Businesses Q&A”, which was translated into Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Myanmar language. In December 2019, the project organized a webinar with the Manager of the Helpdesk to present the service to employers’ and business members’ organizations, enterprises and trade unions. And the [EU-ILO-OECD-OHCHR Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), covering nine countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru) actively promotes the Helpdesk for Business, both in relation to governments encouraging responsible business through National Action Plans (NAPs) and as a tool to support businesses in conducting due diligence. The services and materials of the ILO Helpdesk for Business are widely made available in Pakistan, through the [More and Better Jobs through Socially Responsible Labour Practices](#) project operating in the sports goods manufacturing industry. The Helpdesk was also promoted in Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal in the context of the “Business and Decent Work” project financed by France and the “Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa (ACCEL AFRICA)” financed by the Netherlands implemented in Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria and Uganda (see joint publication that the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS) and MULTI developed in the context of these projects with information on the Helpdesk: [L’abolition effective du travail des enfants en Côte d’Ivoire: Les orientations offertes par la Déclaration de principes tripartite sur les entreprises multinationales et la politique sociale de l’OIT](#)).

Constituents also are actively promoting the Helpdesk. A number of governments (Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland) have included the ILO Helpdesk for Business in their national action plans on business and human rights or feature the service on related web sites as a supporting service for businesses when undertaking human rights due diligence. Several governments have requested the Office for copies of the promotional leaflet to hand out in meetings with business. A number of employers’ organizations, such as the ASEAN Confederation of Employers, the Employers’ Confederation of Philippines (ECOP), and the Employers’ Confederation of Thailand (ECOT), also promote the service.

The [UN Global Compact](#) also continues to promote the service, including in the context of the [business response to Covid-19](#) and the UNGC Action Platform on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains; as do various UN Global Compact Local Networks such as the [UN Global Compact Network UK](#). The Tokyo 2020 Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Tokyo 2020) and various initiatives such as amfori, Know the Chain and Business Fights Poverty are also promoting the service.

I. Expert Advice Service of the ILO Helpdesk for Business

A. Number of queries and users

The Helpdesk has answered 1401 individual queries since it started operations in 2009. During the period March 2020 – February 2021, the Helpdesk answered 178 receivable requests, which is a 40.1% increase over the previous reporting period (127 requests). Much of this surge occurred in the period March – May 2020, in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This reporting period saw a higher than average number of trade unions and workers using the service, as well as journalists. However, the dominant group of users remain MNEs.

Table 1: Breakdown of Users by Type

	March 2020 – February 2021	Cumulative total since 2009
Workers or Trade Unions	14	147
Employers' organizations	0	2
Governments	10	87
Initiatives	5	30
Inter-governmental	9	22
MNEs	123	888
SMEs	0	23
Suppliers	3	17
Researchers/journalists	6	98
NGOs	2	23
Unknown	6	64
TOTAL	178	1401

B. Regional origin of the users and scope of the queries

Table 2 provides a breakdown of users by region. (NB: not all queries contained sufficient information to identify the region of the user.)

During this reporting period, there was a significant increase in the number of users from East Asia and also a slightly smaller increase in users from Latin America, possibly as a result of the promotion of the service through development cooperation projects in these regions. However, the majority of questions continue to come from users in Western Europe.

Table 2: Users by region

	March 2020 – February 2019	Cumulative total since 2009
Africa	8	79
Pacific	0	16
Caribbean	1	20
Central Asia	8	68
East Asia	19	132
Eastern Europe	0	33
Latin America	11	119
Middle East	10	67
North America	0	52
Western Europe	28	556
International	102	318

Table 3 provides a breakdown of regions identified in the queries, if any. During this reporting period, no one region particularly stood out; slightly less than half of questions pertained to global operations or did not specify a region.

Table 3: Regional focus of queries

	March 2020 – February 2021	Cumulative total since 2009
Africa	15	129
Caribbean	0	27
Central Asia	13	134
East Asia	14	183
Eastern Europe	5	58
Latin America	10	131
Middle East	18	124
North America	5	18
Western Europe	12	86
Global/unspecified	86	700

C. Sectors covered in the queries

Table 4 indicates which sectors were specified in queries. A large proportion of questions did not identify a specific sector, as is often the case. There were significantly more questions pertaining to agriculture and public services compared to previous years. There was also an increase in questions pertaining to electronics manufacturing, possibly linked to an ILO training which had a significant number of participants from the sector.

Table 4: Sectors concerned

Sector	March 2020 – February 2021	Cumulative total since 2009
Agriculture	17	99
Artisanal	0	3
Biofuels	0	9
Chemicals	4	32
Construction	8	62
Electronics	12	74
Extractives	4	53
Finance	1	76
Food	0	38
Forestry	0	4
Garments and textiles	7	36
Health services	9	27
Heavy manufacturing	4	44
ITC	6	29
Light manufacturing	3	78
Pharmaceuticals	0	14
Printing/Publishing	0	4
Public services	14	56
Retail	0	30
Services	5	73
Shipping	0	42
Utilities	2	6
Not specified	82	504

D. Issues raised in the queries

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the issues raised in the queries. During this reporting period OSH continued to be a frequent topic of questions, followed by migrant workers, forced labour, child labour, collective bargaining and termination of employment. Social protection is an area of growing interest. An increase in questions concerning definitions reflects a growing trend of companies reading more carefully particular labour standards and seeking clarification on the meaning of specific provisions.

Table 5: Break down of questions by area of MNE Declaration

AREA OF MNE DECLARATION	CATEGORY	MARCH 2020 – FEBRUARY 2021	CUMULATIVE TOTAL SINCE 2009
GENERAL	Compliance with national law	6	50
	Compliance with principles of ILS	0	70
	Definitions	9	37
	FPRW	2	33
	ILO approach to CSR	0	26
EMPLOYMENT	Child labour	11	114
	Forced labour	13	110
	Employment promotion	0	11
	Non-discrimination	7	74
	Termination of employment	11	74
	Employment Relationship	4	9
	Other	0	38
	TRAINING	Skills and training	0
CONDITIONS OF WORK AND LIFE	General	0	15
	HIV/AIDS	0	2
	Hours of work	9	81
	Housing/Food	3	18
	OSH	21	149
	Paid leave	8	19
	Privacy	4	11
	Social security	6	32
	Wages	9	87
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	Collective bargaining	11	37
	Freedom of association	3	31
	Social dialogue	0	12
OTHER	Migrant workers	14	98
	Special categories of workers	4	56
	ILS and productivity	0	3
	ILO approach to sustainable enterprises	0	5
	Interpretation procedure	0	3
	Helpdesk operations	0	18
	Requests for collaboration	3	18
	Company Union Dialogue	1	3
	Statistical information	7	64
	Miscellaneous	14	72
	MNE Declaration as an instrument	0	20

II. ILO Helpdesk for Business Website

The website has been regularly updated with new ILO publications, news concerning activities of the existing ILO Business Networks, webinar recordings and information on the ILO training offer relevant to enterprises.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new section of the Helpdesk web site on Business and COVID-19 was created on 6 April 2020. The new section serves as a one-stop shop for enterprises on relevant ILO COVID-19 resources, including guidance, tools, webinar announcements and recordings, as well as links to key ILO publications, databases and web pages.

A. General data on website visitors⁴

Table 6 provides a summary of activity until the end of February 2021. **The table demonstrates a significant increase in the number of users for a second consecutive year with an increase of 71% compared to the same period last year.** More than one million users have now consulted the ILO Helpdesk for Business web site since its launch in 2010.

The average number of visits per month is 36,452 for the reporting period (March 2020 to February 2021), the highest since the creation of the Helpdesk. The web site is now fast approaching 2 million page views. The number of countries/territories from where the users are based increased from 212 to 225.

Table 6: Helpdesk Website Activity: yearly comparisons⁵ and total

	2011 - 2012	2012 – 2013	2013 – 2014	2014 - 2015	2015 - 2016	2016 – 2017	2017- 2018
Visits (average/ month)	19,717 (1,643)	46,144 (3,845)	55,491 (4,624)	72,421 (6,035)	74,705 (6,225)	82,349 (6,862)	75,742 (6,311)
Users	16,355	40,656	48,937	66,609	67,954	75,376	67,178
% of new users	60%	72.5%	76%	79.65%	78,27%	80,88%	82.5%

⁴ The data is gathered through Google Analytics for the main web site available in English, French and Spanish.

⁵ Years are: March 2011 – February 2012, March 2012 – February 2013, March 2013 – February 2014, March 2014 – February 2015, March 2015-February 2016, March 2016- February 2017, March 2017-February 201, March 2018-February 2019, and March 2019-February 2020. The Website was launched in October 2010 so data for 2010 are excluded.

Countries or territories visitors are located in	144	194	205	209	213	210	210
Pages viewed	48,031	68,364	75,821	94,791	96,984	102,819	97,905

	2018 - 2019	2019- 2020	2020- 2021	Overall Total
Visits (average/ month)	152,218 (12,684)	255,124 (21,260)	437,424 (36,452)	1,271,335 (10,594)
Users	135,706	224,332	391,113	1,134,216
% of new users	82.2%	81.9%	81,3%	-
Countries or territories visitors are located in	212	212	225	-
Pages viewed	222,013	367,447	597,730	1,868,696

B. Geographical Distribution of users

The users were located in all five regions. The Americas remains the region where the majority of users are coming from.

	2011 – 2012	2012 – 2013	2013 – 2014	2014- 2015	2015- 2016	2016- 2017	2017- 2018
Africa	1,471 (7.42%)	2,512 (5.43%)	3,259 (5.86%)	3,456 (4.77%)	2,656 (4.49%)	3,416 (5,13%)	3,590 (5.29%)
Americas	7,128 (35.93%)	23,962 (51.79%)	33,068 (59.50%)	46,929 (64.80%)	40,748 (68.83%)	44,830 (67,31%)	44,706 (65.83%)
Asia	3,088 (15.57%)	5,320 (11.50%)	4,867 (8.76%)	6,284 (8.68%)	5,786 (9.77%)	5,611 (8,42 %)	6,756 (9.95%)
Europe	7,358 (37.09%)	12,263 (26.50%)	11,851 (21.32%)	14,325 (19.78%)	8,959 (15.13%)	11,576 (17,38%)	11,708 (17.24%)
Oceania	448 (2.26%)	875 (1.89%)	1,298 (2.34%)	1,123 (1.55%)	800 (1.35%)	710 (1,07%)	921 (1.36%)
Unknown	344 (1.73%)	1,339 (2.89%)	1,233 (2.22%)	304 (0.42%)	250 (0.42%)	458 (0,69%)	235 (0.35%)

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Africa	6,825 (5.03%)	12,392 (5.49%)	24,462 (6.31%)
Americas	99,240 (73.07%)	173,530 (76.90%)	270,397 (69.74%)
Asia	9,923 (7.31%)	12,138 (5.38%)	54,651 (14.10%)
Europe	18,433 (13.57%)	25,742 (11.41%)	35,182 (9.07%)
Oceania	1,240 (0.91%)	1,452 (0.64%)	2,036 (0.53%)
Unknown	155 (0.11%)	410 (0.18%)	976 (0.25%)

The top 25 countries overall were:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mexico | 14. Philippines |
| 2. Colombia | 15. El Salvador |
| 3. Peru | 16. Dominican Republic |
| 4. India | 17. Honduras |
| 5. Argentina | 18. South Africa |
| 6. Ecuador | 19. Malaysia |
| 7. Spain | 20. Paraguay |
| 8. Japan | 21. Venezuela |
| 9. France | 22. Panama |
| 10. United States | 23. Costa Rica |
| 11. Guatemala | 24. Morocco |
| 12. Chile | 25. United Kingdom |
| 13. Bolivia | |

India has moved up to replace Spain in the top 5 countries.

France mentions the ILO Helpdesk for Business as a supporting service for businesses in their National Action Plan on business and human rights or related web sites and appears in the 9th position of the countries.

C. Most Visited Webpages

The top 3 most visited web sites remain the same with the Q&A on freedom of association in Spanish in the top position. Most pages in the top 10 are in Spanish. It is interesting to note that the new pages on Business and COVID-19 (in English and in Spanish) appear in the top 10.

The top 10 consulted Helpdesk Webpages were:

Web page	Page views
1. Q&A on business and freedom of association (in Spanish)	92,166
2. Q&A on business, discrimination and equality (in Spanish)	75,701
3. Q&As on business and occupational safety and health (in Spanish)	43,693
4. Q&As on business and collective bargaining (in English)	27,104
5. Q&As on wages (in Spanish)	15,193
6. Q&As on business and collective bargaining (in English)	12,574
7. Business and COVID-19 (in Spanish)	12,413
8. Business and collective bargaining (in Spanish)	12,054
9. Business and freedom of association (in Spanish)	11,407
10. Business and COVID-19 (in English)	11,101

D. Site Traffic Sources

During the reporting period (March 2020 to February 2021), 91.4% of the users have accessed the Helpdesk web site through organic search via search engines, 7.7% accessed it directly (taping the URL directly in their browser or clicking on a link from their bookmarks, emails or PDF documents). Only 0.7% were referred to the Helpdesk website from another web site and the remaining accessed it via social media or a reference in an email.