



International
Labour
Organization

► **ILO Helpdesk for Business:
Update report on the expert
advice service and website**

March 2023

A red rectangular box with a dark blue triangle on the left side. The text inside is white and black.

**ILO Helpdesk
for business**

🌐 www.ilo.org/business
✉ assistance@ilo.org

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

Update report March 2023¹

The Governing Body established the ILO Helpdesk for Business in March 2009. The Helpdesk is a free and confidential service that answers individual questions on the application of the principles contained in international labour standards to company operations and the provisions of the [Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy \(MNE Declaration\)](#).

The Office launched the Helpdesk website in October 2010 to provide a one-stop-shop for information, practical tools and upcoming training opportunities that are relevant to companies. The website also features answers to questions received that may be of interest to other users² as well as ILO tools and resources and training opportunities. The Office regularly updates the website with new materials. The Helpdesk website is available in English, French and Spanish; mirror sites exist in Japanese and Chinese and key pages are available in Vietnamese.

The Office actively promotes the Helpdesk – one of the operational tools of the MNE Declaration, as outlined in its annex II. The service can be accessed through the [homepage of the ILO website](#) and is cross-linked from several ILO thematic and department webpages. The Office encourages governments, employers and workers to use the Helpdesk as part of the promotional activities of the MNE Declaration. Other ILO departments and programmes also promote the service, notably the [International Labour Standards](#) department. The ILO International Training Centre in Turin also promotes the Helpdesk during relevant trainings, such as the Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) “*Entreprises et travail décent en Afrique*” attended by more than 1200 participants from Francophone Africa in September-October 2022. Questions coming out of the Helpdesk individual service often serve as a basis for stimulating discussion on real-world situations during class discussions, especially in the annual “*International labour standards and corporate social responsibility: the labour dimension of human rights due diligence*” course.

A promotional leaflet on the ILO Helpdesk exists in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Myanmar, Thai, Vietnamese, Urdu, Nepalese and Chinese and is

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 2022 - 28 February 2023.

² Posted questions may be modified to preserve confidentiality.

widely distributed among governments, employers, workers, enterprises and partners. The leaflet currently is being updated in line with the new ILO branding guidelines.

ILO development cooperation projects that work with companies also promote the Helpdesk. In Latin America, the project EU-ILO-OECD-OHCHR Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean, which covers nine countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru), actively promotes the Helpdesk, both in relation to governments encouraging responsible business conduct through National Action Plans (NAPs) on business and human rights and as a tool to support businesses in conducting due diligence. The project has developed a social media campaign on the Helpdesk promoted through the ILO Americas Regional Office's official Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. These materials will become the basis for a similar social media campaign at the global level.

In the Asia region the Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations project, covering four countries in Asia (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Japan and Viet Nam) and the Trade for Decent Work project undertook promotional activities on the Helpdesk as well as the Sustainable supply chains to build forward better project for the rubber gloves sector in Malaysia.

In Africa, the ILO Helpdesk for Business was promoted on the occasion of the First Regional Dialogue on Business and Human Rights in Africa, in the context of sub-regional dialogues on NAPs on business and human rights as well as through various development cooperation projects, including the project "Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa" (ACCEL-Africa) implemented in 6 countries, the project "Trade for Decent Work" implemented in five countries and the project Addressing decent work deficits and improving access to rights in Malawi's Tobacco sector.

ILO members are promoting the Helpdesk. The following include promotional efforts not previously reported on: Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Portugal, and Thailand; the ASEAN Confederation of Employers and the Employers' Confederation of the Philippines; and the workers' organization Centre International de solidarité ouvrière and CNV International.

The UN Global Compact continues to promote the service. As part of the UN Global Compact's Business and Human Rights Accelerator Programme, interactive sessions with the manager of the Helpdesk are scheduled to assist companies in embedding the labour dimension in human rights due diligence processes. Additionally, the ILO Helpdesk is referenced in the newly launched and freely accessible online learning plan "Advancing Decent Work through the UN Global Compact Labour Principles."

Other international initiatives that promote the Helpdesk not previously reported on include the Initiative for Compliance and Sustainability (ICS), Ethical Trading Initiative

(ETI), Building Responsibly, International Federation for Human Rights, and the Organization of Women in International Trade - Toronto.

I. Individual service

A. Number of queries and users

The largest groups of users are companies, workers and their representatives and CSR/RBC 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/RBC policies and national action plans on business and human rights) and employers' organizations. Other users include NGOs, journalists, consultants, and academic researchers.

The Helpdesk has answered 1695 individual queries since its establishment in 2009. During the period March 2022 – February 2023, the Helpdesk answered 137 receivable requests, which is an 12% decrease from the previous reporting period (157 requests) but 10% above the annual usage average across all years of operation, which is 125.

The dominant group of users remain overwhelmingly MNEs (93 out of 137 questions). This period saw a significant increase of questions coming from non-governmental CSR/RBC initiatives (+44%). The most significant drops were among researchers and journalists (-50%) and trade unions (-36%). Table 1 provides a breakdown of users.

► **Table 1: Breakdown of Users by Type**

	March 2022 – February 2023	Cumulative total
Workers or Trade Unions	7	163
Employers' organizations	1	3
Governments	8	108
Initiatives	9	39
Inter-governmental	3	32
CSR/RBC Initiatives	13	52
MNEs	93	1091
SMEs	0	25
Suppliers	4	25
Researchers/journalists	2	103
NGOs	0	27
Unknown	0	66
TOTAL	137	1695

B. Regional origin of the users

Relatively few questions contained sufficient information to identify the region of the user. Among those that did, the majority of users continue to be from Western Europe, followed by East Asia, Latin America and Africa – regions where most of the promotional activities on the Helpdesk take place. Table 2 provides a breakdown of users by region.

► **Table 2: Users by region**

	March 2022 – February 2023	Cumulative total
Africa	8	93
Pacific	0	18
Caribbean	0	20
Central Asia	6	78
East Asia	9	153
Eastern Europe	0	33
Latin America	4	129
Middle East	5	76
North America	0	52
Western Europe	12	589
International	93	507

C. Regional Focus of Questions received

During this period, the large majority of questions pertained again to global operations; and the regions of interest specified remained more or less stable across the regions. Table 3 provides a breakdown of regions identified in the queries.

► **Table 3: Regional focus of queries**

	March 2022 – February 2023	Cumulative total
Africa	6	142
Caribbean	0	27
Central Asia	6	144
East Asia	6	197
Eastern Europe	3	64
Latin America	4	141
Middle East	3	133
North America	1	19
Western Europe	8	101
Global/unspecified	100	916

D. Sectors covered in the queries

Table 4 indicates which sectors were specified in queries. The most significant changes include:

- a drop in questions concerning agriculture (from 17 to 11); concerning health services (from 8 to 2); and a large decrease in questions concerning public services (from 21 to 5).
- a large increase of questions concerning extractives (from 0 to 11); and an increase concerning construction (from 2 to 7).

► **Table 4: Sectors concerned**

Sector	March 2021 – February 2022	March 2022 – February 2023	Cumulative total
Agriculture	17	11	127
Artisanal	0	1	4
Biofuels	0	4	13
Chemicals	0	4	36
Construction	2	7	71
Electronics	3	4	81
Extractives	0	11	64
Finance	0	3	79
Food	0	1	39
Forestry	0	1	5
Garments and textiles	8	8	52
Health services	8	2	37
Heavy manufacturing	0	5	49
ITC	6	2	37
Light manufacturing	4	7	89
Pharmaceuticals	0	0	14
Printing/Publishing	0	0	4
Public services	21	5	82
Retail	0	4	34
Services	7	3	83
Shipping	2	0	44
Utilities	0	0	6
Not specified	79	54	637

E. Issues raised in the queries

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the issues raised in the queries during this reporting period. Among the fundamentals, OSH-related questions continued to be the most

frequent, followed by forced labour, child labour, non-discrimination and freedom of association; there were no questions during this period on collective bargaining. Wages and migrant workers also continue to be important focus areas. Two questions concerned labour issues in the informal economy. Two new information pages were added to the Helpdesk website to provide further information on labour migration and violence and harassment.

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

AREA OF MNE DECLARATION	CATEGORY	MARCH 2022 – FEBRUARY 2023	CUMULATIVE TOTAL
GENERAL	Compliance with national law	5	58
	Compliance with principles of ILS	3	80
	Definitions	0	45
	FPRW	1	39
	ILO approach to CSR	0	27
EMPLOYMENT	Child labour	8	136
	Forced labour	10	131
	Employment promotion	0	11
	Formality	2	5
	Non-discrimination	5	83
	Termination of employment	4	86
	Employment Relationship	0	9
	Other	1	42
TRAINING	Skills and training	1	14
CONDITIONS OF WORK AND LIFE	General	0	15
	HIV/AIDS	1	3
	Hours of work	9	97
	Housing/Food	2	20
	OSH	19	192
	Paid leave	1	20
	Privacy	0	11
	Social security	3	40
	Wages	10	109
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	Collective bargaining	0	41
	Freedom of association	4	41
	Social dialogue	0	12
OTHER	Migrant workers	6	113
	Special categories of workers	2	63
	ILS and productivity	0	3
	ILO approach to sustainable enterprises	1	6
	Interpretation procedure	0	3
	Helpdesk operations	0	18
	Requests for collaboration	4	28
	Company Union Dialogue	0	4
	Statistical information	6	79
	Miscellaneous	14	100
	MNE Declaration as an instrument	0	20

II. ILO Helpdesk for Business Website

The website has been regularly updated with new information, including new ILO publications and training tools. Two new thematic sections have been created to respond to the increase of questions received via the individual expert service: a section on "[Business and the labour dimension of human rights due diligence](#)" with [tools and resources for business on the labour dimension of human rights due diligence](#), a section "[Business and Violence and Harassment](#)" with [tools and resources for business on violence and harassments](#) as well as a section "[Business and Labour Migration](#)" with [tools and resources for business on labour migration](#).

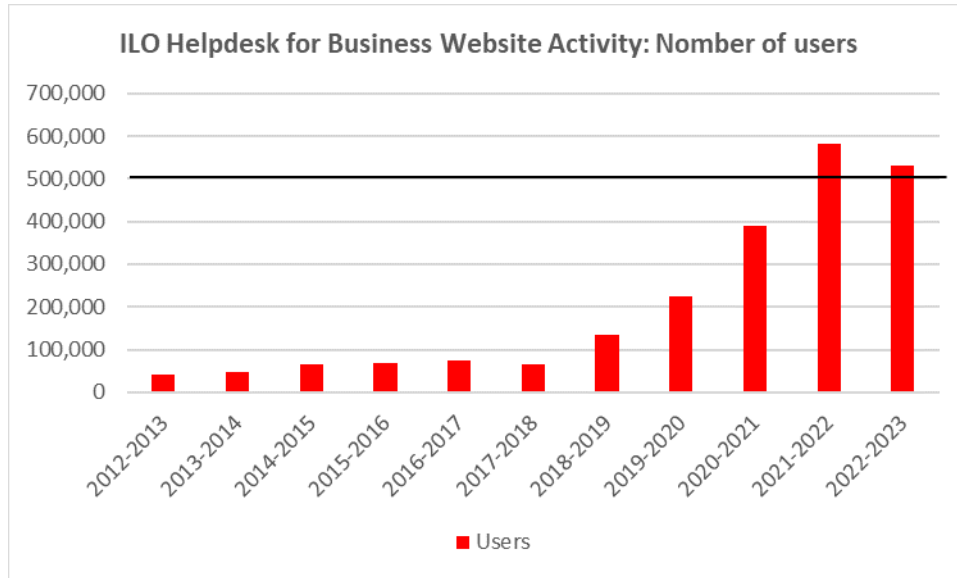
The Helpdesk also created a "[Country information hub](#)" where enterprises have direct access to ILO databases/web pages providing country information on different labour rights to inform their human rights due diligence processes.

The UN Global Compact, the ILO and the ITC-ILO developed an [e-learning plan for companies to strengthen business respect for labour principles of the UN Global Compact](#). Based on ILO standards, resources and tools, as well as the guidance offered by the ILO MNE Declaration, this free joint e-learning plan which aims to support companies in advancing decent work throughout their operations and in the supply chains is being readily available on the ILO Helpdesk for Business website.

A. General data on website visitors

Table 6 provides a summary of activity until the end of February 2023. The number of annual users remains above the level of 500,000 reached last year³ with a slight decrease (531,147 for the period 2022-2023 compares to 581,394 for the previous reporting period).

³ The data is gathered through Google Analytics, and since the 2021-2022 reporting period includes all web sites of the Helpdesk in English, French, Spanish and the mirror sites in Chinese and Japanese.



The average number of approximately 50,000 visits each month is similar to last reporting period (49,922 for March 2022 to February 2023 compares to 54,481 for the same period last year).

The web site now cumulates more than 3.5 million page views.

► Table 6: Helpdesk Website Activity: yearly comparisons⁴ and total

	2011 - 2012	2012- 2013	2013- 2014	2014 - 2015	2015 - 2016	2016- 2017	2017- 2018	2018 - 2019	2019- 2020	2020- 2021	2021- 2022	2022- 2023	Overall Total
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)	152,218 (12,684)	255,124 (21,260)	437,424 (36,452)	653,772 (54,481)	49,922	2,524,182
Users	16,355	40,656	48,937	66,609	67,954	75,376	67,178	135,706	224,332	391,113	581,394	531,147	2,246,757
% of new users	60%	72.5%	76%	79.65%	78,27%	80,88%	82.5%	82.2%	81.9%	81,3%	82.7%	83%	-
Countries or territories visitors are located in	144	194	205	209	213	210	210	212	212	225	228	224	-
Pages viewed	48,031	68,364	75,821	94,791	96,984	102,819	97,905	222,013	367,447	597,730	860,268	782,929	3,511,893

⁴ The Website was launched in October 2010, so data for 2010 are excluded. Data were compiled from 1 March to 28 February of each year.

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 (more than 60%). Asia remains above the level of 20% reached last year following the continued promotional efforts of various information materials in different national languages developed by the EU-ILO-OECD Responsible Supply Chains in Asia project.

	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
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%)	6,825 (5.03%)	12,392 (5.49%)	24,462 (6.31%)	34,300 (5.89%)	33,951 (6.34%)
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%)	99,240 (73.07%)	173,530 (76.90%)	270,397 (69.74%)	365,161 (62.73%)	340,532 (63.62%)
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%)	9,923 (7.31%)	12,138 (5.38%)	54,651 (14.10%)	135,977 (23.36%)	115,445 (21.57%)
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%)	18,433 (13.57%)	25,742 (11.41%)	35,182 (9.07%)	43,822 (7.53%)	43,253 (8.08%)
Oceania	448 (2.26%)	875 (1.89%)	1,298 (2.34%)	1,123 (1.55%)	800 (1.35%)	710 (1.07%)	921 (1.36%)	1,240 (0.91%)	1,452 (0.64%)	2,036 (0.53%)	2,442 (0.42%)	1,801 (0.34%)
Unknown	344 (1.73%)	1,339 (2.89%)	1,233 (2.22%)	304 (0.42%)	250 (0.42%)	458 (0.69%)	235 (0.35%)	155 (0.11%)	410 (0.18%)	976 (0.25%)	428 (0.02%)	259 (0.05%)

The top 25 countries overall were:

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

C. Most Visited Webpages

The web pages containing Q&As on wages, freedom of association and occupational safety and health all in Spanish are the most visited. Followed by Q&As and topic pages in Spanish, English and French on various subjects. Users continue to demonstrate strong interest in issues such as freedom of association and collective bargaining, wages, occupational safety and health, and non-discrimination and equality.

The top 10 consulted Helpdesk Webpages were:

Webpage	Page views
1. Q&A on wages (in Spanish)	107,492
2. Q&A on business and freedom of association (in Spanish)	90,382
3. Q&As on business and occupational health and safety (in Spanish)	64,782
4. Q&As on collective bargaining (in English)	45,459
5. Q&As on business, discrimination and equality (in English)	44,746
6. Q&As on business, non-discrimination and equality (in Spanish)	41,842
7. Q&As on collective bargaining (in Spanish)	18,068
8. Q&As on wages (in English)	15,684
9. Business and freedom of association (in Spanish)	13,824
10. Business and COVID-19 (in Spanish)	11,321
11. Q&As on business and occupational safety and health (in French)	10,947

D. Site Traffic Sources

Most users (91.5%) have accessed the Helpdesk website through organic searches via search engines, 7.6% accessed it directly (taping the URL directly in their browser or clicking on a link from their bookmarks or PDF documents). Only 0.8% were referred to the Helpdesk website from another web site and the remaining accessed it via social media or a reference in an email.

The following are among the top referral web site sites:

- Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) of Japan: 252
- Academic, administrative, Commercial CRM and virtual education information system for educational institutions/Sistema de información académico, administrativo, Comercial CRM y de educación virtual para instituciones de educación (<https://site4.q10.com/>): 246
- Freedom United: 146
- Ministry of Health, labour and Welfare of Japan (MHLW): 140
- UN Global Compact: 85
- International Training Center of the ILO (ITC-ILO): 80

Contact details

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

ILO Helpdesk for Business
<http://www.ilo.org/assistance>
assistance@ilo.org