



International
Labour
Organization

► **ILO Helpdesk for Business:
Report on the expert advice
service and website
January 2023-December 2023**

February 2024



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

Report for January 2023 – December 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](#).

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. It posts 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 web site 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 thematic and department pages. The Office encourages constituents to use the Helpdesk as part of the promotional activities of the MNE Declaration. Other ILO departments and programmes promote the service, notably [NORMES](#). The ILO International Training Centre in Turin also promotes the Helpdesk during relevant trainings. Questions and responses from the individual assistance service of the Helpdesk feature on the website of the Helpdesk as general Q&As. They are also used in trainings as a basis for stimulating discussion on real-world situations.

The promotional leaflet of the ILO Helpdesk has been updated in 2023. The revised version exists in English, French, Spanish and Portuguese and is widely distributed among constituents and enterprises and partners.

¹ The Office has produced an annual report for the tripartite Governing Body Advisory Committee since the launch of the Helpdesk service. The reporting period originally covered 1 March to 28 February of each year to allow for a comparison over the years as well as to compile cumulative totals. However, constituents have requested to receive the Helpdesk report earlier to inform their discussion on the promotional activities of the MNE Declaration in the March session of the Governing Body. Therefore, going forward, the reports will be on a calendar basis, with the current report being the transition report which covers January – December 2023.

² Posted questions may be modified to preserve confidentiality.

Following a successful employer-led promotion campaign in Latin America, as part of the project [EU-ILO-OECD-OHCHR Responsible Business Conduct in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), vignettes developed for the social media campaign are being adapted and translated for use by other countries and projects. The RBC LAC project continues to promote the Helpdesk more generally, along with other development cooperation projects, including [Trade for Decent Work](#), funded by the European Commission and Finland; [Supply Chains for a Sustainable Future of Work](#), funded by the European Commission; Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa” ([ACCEL-Africa](#)) funded by the Netherlands; and [Building Responsible Value Chains in Asia through the Promotion of Decent Work in Business Operations](#) and the [Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Supply Chains Asia](#), both funded by Japan.

The Office promotes the Helpdesk at all relevant events. More notable ones in this reporting period include the International Forum on Sustainable Mineral Supply Chains, the Business and Human Rights Forum in South Asia, the Business and Human Rights Forum in Asia, the World Investment Forum, and the World Investment Conference. And the Helpdesk continues to be referenced in tools being developed for companies, such as the Joint UN Global Compact-ILO learning plan for companies “Advancing decent work through the UN Global Compact Labour Principles” and the Handbook of Responsible Business Conduct, jointly developed by ILO, UN Women, UNDP, and UNICEF (in China, currently in preparation).

Constituents also continue to promote the Helpdesk. ILO member States which have appointed [national focal points for the promotion of the MNE Declaration](#) are actively promoting the ILO Helpdesk among enterprises operating in their country such as the [Ghana Employers’ Association](#). Other examples not previously reported include: [CSR Flanders](#), the [Italian OECD national contact point](#), the [Employers’ Federation of Pakistan](#), the [Federation of Ugandan Employers](#), and the [International Domestic Workers’ Federation](#). And initiatives are also promoting the Helpdesk, such as [Bonsucro](#), [KnowTheChain](#), and [Sedex](#).

I. Individual assistance service

A. Number of queries and users

The largest groups of users of the individual assistance service 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 answered 1741 individual queries since its establishment in 2009 through December 2023. During the period January – December 2023, the Helpdesk answered

207 receivable requests.³ Compared to previous yearly average numbers (see in 2023 report) this number of 207 requests is much above the 125 annual usage average across all years of operation of the Helpdesk, even though because of the change in the reporting period, the numbers are not fully comparable.

The dominant group of users remain overwhelmingly MNEs (129 out of 207 questions or 62%). Other significant groups of users included non-governmental CSR/RBC initiatives (23); and various government entities (12), many of which concerned procurement (7). The number of self-identified suppliers seeking clarification of a request from a buyer rose the most significantly in this period (7). Table 1 provides a breakdown of users.

► **Table 1: Breakdown of Users by Type⁴**

	January - December 2023	Cumulative total as of December 2023
Workers or Trade Unions	9	170
Employers' organizations	0	3
Governments	12	119
Inter-governmental	5	37
CSR/RBC Initiatives	23	73
MNEs	129	1220
SMEs	2	27
Suppliers	7	31
Researchers/journalists	3	106
NGOs	1	28
Unknown	14	80
TOTAL	207	1882

B. Regional origin of the users

A larger number of questions than usual contained information that allows for identification of the region of the user. Many came from Western Europe, followed by Eastern Europe, East Asia, Latin America and Africa. Table 2 provides a breakdown of users by region.

³ Due to the change in reporting period from March-February to January-December a comparison with previous years' figures is not possible. This will resume with next year's report. This also affects the totals provided in the Tables.

⁴ NB: the users do not sum to the total users, due to some falling into more than one category, e.g., "SMEs" and "suppliers".

► **Table 2: Users by region**

	January - December 2023	Cumulative total as of December 2023
Africa	4	96
Pacific	0	18
Caribbean	1	21
Central Asia	7	83
East Asia	2	154
Eastern Europe	6	38
Latin America	3	131
Middle East	2	78
North America	3	55
Western Europe	28	609
International	70	554

C. Regional Focus of Questions received

During this period, the large majority of questions pertained to global operations, continuing the trend of the past years; 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**

	January - December 2023	Cumulative total as of December 2023
Africa	4	145
Caribbean	1	28
Central Asia	9	152
East Asia	12	207
Eastern Europe	8	71
Latin America	6	146
Middle East	5	137
North America	3	22
Western Europe	13	113
Global/unspecified	146	916

D. Sectors covered in the queries

Table 4 indicates which sectors were specified in queries. Agriculture and extractives were the two sector most frequently specified in the questions. However, the majority of the questions were not sector specific.

► **Table 4: Sectors concerned**

Sector	January – December 2023	Cumulative total as of December 2023
Agriculture	13	127
Artisanal	3	4
Biofuels	0	13
Chemicals	3	36
Construction	5	71
Electronics	3	81
Extractives	13	64
Finance	3	79
Food	0	39
Forestry	3	5
Garments and textiles	5	52
Health services	3	37
Heavy manufacturing	2	49
ITC	0	37
Light manufacturing	5	89
Pharmaceuticals	0	14
Printing/Publishing	0	4
Public services	4	82
Retail	0	34
Services	7	83
Shipping	2	44
Utilities	0	6
Not specified	135	637

E. Issues raised in the queries

Table 5 provides a breakdown of the issues raised in the queries during this reporting period. Questions related to occupational safety and health continued to be the most frequent, followed by wages, forced labour (often linked to migration), hours of work, and non-discrimination (most concerning people with disabilities or violence and harassment at work).

There were two questions pertaining to an obligation to report information coming from a social audit to the public labour inspectorate).

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

AREA OF MNE DECLARATION	TOPIC	JANUARY – DECEMBER 2023	CUMULATIVE TOTAL AS OF DECEMBER 2023
GENERAL	Compliance with national law	6	63
	Compliance with codes of conduct on particular labour provisions	2	81
	Definitions	2	47
	FPRW	4	43
	ILO approach to CSR	0	27
EMPLOYMENT	Child labour	6	141
	Forced labour	15	145
	Employment promotion	2	13
	Formality	3	7
	Non-discrimination	10	91
	Termination of employment	4	90
	Employment Relationship	0	9
	Other	0	42
TRAINING	Skills and training	1	15
CONDITIONS OF WORK AND LIFE	General	0	15
	HIV/AIDS	0	3
	Hours of work	12	110
	Housing/Food	1	21
	OSH	23	109
	Paid leave	2	22
	Privacy	0	11
	Social security	2	42
	Wages	16	123
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	Collective bargaining	1	42
	Freedom of association	4	44
	Social dialogue	0	12
OTHER	Migrant workers	18	131
	Special categories of workers	4	67
	ILS and productivity	1	4
	ILO approach to sustainable enterprises	0	6
	Interpretation procedure	0	3
	Helpdesk operations	0	18
	Requests for collaboration	5	33
	Company Union Dialogue	0	4
	Statistical information	7	85
	Miscellaneous	26	124
	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. A new thematic section on [Business and Violence and Harassment](#) with [Tools and resources for business on violence and harassment in the world of work](#) has been created to meet the increased demand from enterprises for information on this topic. The ILO Helpdesk for Business web site now covers a total of 15 different thematic areas.

A. General data on website visitors

Table 6 provides a summary of activity for calendar years 2022 and 2023 and cumulative data since the creation of the website in 2010.

The data is gathered through Google Analytics and include all web sites of the Helpdesk in English, French, Spanish and the mirror sites in Chinese and Japanese.

Please note that the reference period for previous annual reports on the Helpdesk covered the period 1 March to 28 February. The current report covers data collected during the 2023 calendar (1 January to 31 December 2023).

The 2023 number of annual users is 517,800 and remains above the level of 500,000 reached in 2022.⁵

The cumulative number of pages viewed has now exceeded 4 million.

► **Table 6: Helpdesk Website Activity: Comparison for Calendar Year 2022 and 2023, and Cumulative Total since 2010**

	Calendar year 2022	Calendar year 2023	Cumulative total as of December 2023
Visits (sessions) and (average/month)	653,772 (54,481)	579,704 (48,308)	3,025,522
Users	581,394	517,800	2,701,618
% of new users	82.7%	88%	-
Countries or territories visitors are located in	228	223	-
Pages viewed	860,268	757,772	4,304,454

⁵ 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.

B. Geographical Distribution of users

The users were located in all five regions. The Americas remains by far the region where the majority of users are coming from (more than 60%) followed by Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania. This may be linked to the promotional campaign on the Helpdesk that was conducted in 2023.

Region	2023
Africa	33,865
Americas	332,065
Asia	98,951
Europe	49,727
Oceania	2,485
Unknown	427

The top 25 countries overall were:

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

C. Most Visited Webpages

The web pages containing Q&As on freedom of association, wages, occupational safety and health and non-discrimination in Spanish were the most visited. Followed by Q&As on collective bargaining in English. 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 5 consulted Helpdesk Webpages were:

Webpage	Page views
1. Preguntas y respuestas sobre las empresas y la libertad sindical y de asociación	90,146
2. Preguntas y respuestas sobre las empresas y los salarios	88,822
3. Preguntas y respuestas sobre las empresas y la SST	59,716
4. Preguntas y respuestas sobre las empresas, discriminación e igualdad	51,401
5. Q&As on business and collective bargaining	48,753

D. Site Traffic Sources

Most users (88%) have accessed the Helpdesk web site through organic searches via search engines, 8.5% accessed it directly (taping the URL directly in their browser or clicking on a link from their bookmarks or PDF documents). Only 0.9% 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:

- Sistema de información académico, administrativo, Comercial CRM y de educación virtual para instituciones de educación: 436
- Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) of Japan:306
- UN Global Compact: 152
- Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan: 109
- International Training Center of the ILO (ITC-ILO): 104
- Freedom United: 65

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