

# Commonwealth countries doing better on COVID19, but still not protecting workers well enough: employers getting worse

ITUC Global COVID-19 Survey 20 April - 23 April 2020  
Commonwealth Key Findings

---

Compared with our previous survey at the start of the month, governments in the Commonwealth have toughened their responses to the pandemic in terms of lockdowns, and only non-member Zimbabwe is opening up, compared with one in five of countries globally.

Supplies of Personal Protective Equipment are slightly better in Commonwealth countries than the rest of the world, and Commonwealth governments are doing better than average on ensuring safe workplaces. But a majority of Commonwealth countries are still not providing PPE always or very often, and in only a quarter of them do unions rate the safety at workplaces to be good.

Commonwealth governments have got slightly better at responding to the pandemic, but employers have slipped back, with unions now reporting that a majority are not responding well, the opposite of the findings in our earlier survey.

The global trade union movement is calling on governments and occupational health and safety bodies around the world to recognise Covid-19 as an occupational disease. Workers need governments to require reporting and recording of work-related cases, as well as compensation schemes and medical care for victims for work-related Covid-19 and for their bereaved families. At the ILO, the ITUC is campaigning for a new standard on biological hazards and for occupational health and safety to be included in the list of fundamental workers' rights.

## Introduction

148 trade unions from 107 countries took part in the third ITUC Global COVID-19 Survey between 20 – 23 April 2020. This is up from 116 trade unions from 94 countries which took part in the second survey between 30 March – 2 April 2020.

Five questions were asked using an online survey platform to monitor government responses, review provisions of personal protective equipment and safe workplaces, and assess how well or badly governments and employers are responding to the crisis.

23 out of 54 Commonwealth countries (including Zimbabwe) responded, up from 21 in the previous survey. They were *Australia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Canada, Fiji, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Samoa, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, the UK, Zambia and Zimbabwe*.

## **1. Government Responses to COVID-19**

- 70% (or 16 out of 23) Commonwealth countries who completed this survey are containing the spread of the virus with national lockdown measures, slightly up on the previous survey (67% or 14 countries)
- 6 countries (or 26%) are delaying the spread with promotion of hand washing etc.
- Just one of the countries surveyed (Zimbabwe – currently not a member of the Commonwealth) is undertaking a partial re-opening and none are undertaking a full re-opening, compared with 17% of countries in the global survey.

## 2. Supplies of Personal Protective Equipment

- Under half (44%) of the 23 Commonwealth countries who responded to the survey said that PPE supplies were *always* (5 countries, 22%) or *very often* (5 countries, 22%) adequate. This compares with global figures of 16% *always* and 33% *very often*. So while more Commonwealth countries are *always* supplying PPE than globally, overall, Commonwealth countries are less likely to provide PPE *always* or *very often*.
- 39% (9 countries) said PPE supplies were only *sometimes* adequate, slightly higher than globally.
- 4 countries (17%) said that supplies were rarely or never adequate, roughly the same as globally.

## 3. Safe workplaces

- Just 6 of the 23 (26%) Commonwealth countries who responded to this survey rate the measures that are in place to protect workers as *good*, although this was better than the 21% for all countries.
- Over half (57% or 13 countries) would rate the protections as *fair*.
- 4 countries or 17% would rate the protections as *poor*, better than the 24% of countries globally.

## 4. Assessment of government responses

- 65% or 15 of the 23 Commonwealth countries who responded to this survey believe that their government is responding *well* to the needs of workers, roughly the same as globally, and up from 62% in the previous survey.
- 35% or 8 countries believe that they are responding *badly*.

## 5. Assessment of employer responses

- 12 of the 23 Commonwealth countries in this survey (52%) believe employers are responding badly to the needs of workers, considerably up on the 43% reported in the last survey, more in line now with the global trend (51%).
- Only 48% (11 countries) believe they are responding well, whereas when we last asked this question, it was a majority.