

International Labour Organisation

Virtual Global Summit

Good afternoon colleagues and thank you, Director General, for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. I particularly want to thank you Guy, congratulate you and the ILO for organising these Global Summit events, including the Europe Day last week and Global Leaders' Day yesterday.

I welcome the interventions so far today from the distinguished representatives of other governments and of worker and employer organisations.

The Centenary Declaration adopted by the ILO last year underlined the need for a human centred future of work and the priorities it set out remain valid now as we look towards recovery from the COVID-19 emergency.

As others have said, COVID-19 is the biggest challenge the world has faced in decades. The ILO and its constituents have a critical role to play in the socio-economic response. We all share the same objectives – to protect workers and businesses, and to support a swift and safe economic recovery.

And in the UK, we have had good consultation with our social partners on our response to this emergency. After record employment rates just a few months ago here in the UK, we acted swiftly to avoid mass unemployment with the introduction of a Job Retention Scheme in which the government guaranteed 80% of employees' pay up to £2,500 a month, and a similar support scheme for the self-employed with grants that would help support workers and businesses through this time.

These schemes have been a lifeline to millions of people, with 9.4 million people supported on the Job Retention Scheme and 2.7 million people who are Self-Employed. This is covering in effect, over a third of working people in our country. We are making some changes to increase the flexibility in both schemes to help prepare people to get working fully again as we will phase out the Job Retention Scheme entirely by the end of October. For those on the frontline, we have ensured that our occupational health and safety systems continue to protect health workers and indeed all others who deliver critical public services. We have developed tools and measures to help the safe return to work for the wider UK economy.

Our main social security system, Universal Credit, responded excellently to the unprecedented numbers of claims. We made temporary changes on access to benefits to manage that demand and to get money to people as quickly as possible. We also injected several billions of pounds directly into the welfare system. The distribution analysis that we published yesterday shows that our interventions so far have largely helped the poorest in our nation reflecting the importance of social justice for this government and is at the heart of our decision making during this emergency.

As we are now over the peak, we are returning to a focus of helping people into work as quickly as possible. We must ensure that our measures continue to protect all workers in need, including those with disabilities and the should be irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, age, religion or other status.

The UK launched its 'Plan for Jobs 2020' yesterday and it builds on and bolsters existing support offered.

Training will be crucial for those without work, so that they maintain their work-readiness and they may need new skills to quickly move back into work. We are particularly focusing on young people, who are already disadvantaged due to their lack of skills and work experience. That is why we have announced the largest ever expansion of traineeships to ensure that 16-24 year olds have the tools needed to enter the world of work and why we are introducing a "Kick-Start Scheme" to create more decent jobs for young people.

The impacts of the crisis are also felt disproportionately by women, who are over represented as frontline care workers and they experience violence and harassment in the workplace, and continue to do the majority of unpaid care work.

At the global level, the UK has made available substantial amounts of aid funding to help mitigate the impact of coronavirus on the world's most vulnerable countries. This is in addition to pivoting much of our existing international development activity to provide health, humanitarian and economic support where it is needed most.

The role of social protection in reducing poverty, building resilience and reducing humanitarian needs globally is highly relevant to this emergency. The UK is committed to helping governments to increase the coverage, quality and sustainability of their systems and to build more inclusive systems particularly for women and girls.

A major concern is that the pandemic reverses years of progress towards the ending of forced labour and similar issues. That's why we support the Alliance 8.7 call for an urgent and coordinated multi-stakeholder response to this common threat.

And finally, as the UK takes up Presidency of the G7 next year we will look to support an open, sustainable and inclusive global recovery to the pandemic.

Thank you.