

Putting people first

12 governments show the world how to protect lives, jobs and incomes



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The ITUC has analysed the government responses of 69 countries for whom we have information on the ITUC COVID-19 webpage. The best of these responses have provided immediate support for workers and the real economy with paid sick leave, wage or income support and other measures. The responses have been assessed against five core policies essential for working people as large segments of our economies have been shut down to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The ITUC Global COVID-19 Survey 17-23 March found:

53% of countries are containing the virus with lockdown measures closing schools and non-essential businesses.

50% of countries are without free healthcare.

More money is being spent on business bailouts (29% of countries) than providing sick leave for all workers (21% of countries).

This underscores that it is critical to advocate for the highest standards of support, firstly for frontline workers – health workers, care workers, transport and municipal workers, those in related services and more – and in parallel for all workers affected by the economic circumstances generated by the lockdown and restrictions on movement and gathering of groups of people.

While there are still gaps that unions will pursue, the positive responses to the pandemic demonstrated by these countries have been the result either of strong tripartite or social dialogue structures and traditions, or concerted and successful campaigning and lobbying by trade unions. The involvement of unions representing working people is key to ensuring that governments act to put people first in the response to COVID-19.

Putting people first

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		Paid sick leave	Wage support	Income support*	Mortgage, rent or loan relief	Free health care
	Argentina	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Austria	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	Canada	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	France	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	Germany	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	Norway	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Singapore	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Sweden	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
	UK	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* e.g., freelancers, self-employed, gig economy workers.

ARGENTINA



Wage support: The state will pay a portion of the wages of workers, especially of those working in SMEs, to guarantee full salary for 14 days.

Income support: Unemployment insurance is strengthened and income support for platform workers, freelancers, and other self-employed workers is offered for an amount of 10,000 pesos for April.

Loan relief: All payments of loans, mortgages and business loans are postponed until April.

AUSTRIA



Wage support: Guarantees 80% net for salaries over EUR 2,685 salary; 85% between EUR 1,700 and EUR 2,685; and 90% for up to EUR 1,700.

Income support: For the self-employed, Kurzarbeiterhilfe is a part-time work measure that guarantees 90% of the net wage if the gross was EUR 1,700 or less; 85% of the net wage if the gross wage was between EUR 1,700 and 2,685; and 80% of the net wage if the gross wage was between EUR 2,685 and 5,370.

CANADA



Sick leave: Improved sick leave policies to support employees self-isolating when ill, suspending the need for medical notes, waiving the one-week waiting period for Employment Insurance sickness benefits. Employment Insurance sickness benefits up to 15 weeks of income replacement for those unable to work because of illness, injury or quarantine. Financial support for those who don't qualify for employment insurance or don't have access to paid sick leave (up to CAD 900 biweekly for 15 weeks).

Income support: Additional emergency support benefit for self-employed and part-time workers who do not qualify for Employment Insurance.

Loan relief: The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) launched a revised Insured Mortgage Purchase Program whereby the government will purchase up to CAD 50 billion of insured mortgage pools through CMHC. Temporary suspension of eviction notices in some provinces (e.g., Ontario). Doubling of the Reaching Home Program that provides funding for the homeless and establishment of a fund to help indigenous communities.

DENMARK



Sick leave: Six weeks full sick leave for COVID-19 patients who are quarantined and isolated.

Wage and income support: Three months of income support to guarantee 75%-90%, but not more than DKK 23,000, self-employed included. The work-sharing scheme (Arbejdsfordeling), which provides unemployment benefits during periods of temporary unemployment, applies under the following conditions: (1) Firms need to be covered by a collective agreement. (2) Employers and employees must agree on reducing working hours, within a limited, low-demand period, in order to avoid redundancies. (3) According to the Law on Supplementary Unemployment Benefit, the employees must qualify as active job seekers. Work sharing can take place over a maximum of 13 weeks. The scheme will be effective from 9 March - 9 June 2020. State wage compensation for the companies will cover 75% of the wage but not more than DKK 23,000 per month and full-time employee; for non-salaried employees the wage compensation is 90% of the wage but not more than DKK 26,000 a month per full-time employee. For the duration of the wage compensation period, the company refrains from dismissing employees for economic reasons. The individual worker for whom the company seeks wage compensation retains his/her full monthly wage but must take holiday or time off amounting to a total of five days in connection with the compensation period.

FRANCE



Sick leave: Is extended to parents with children for up to 14 days.

Wage and income support: Workers who cannot work remotely have a wage guarantee of 70%, including the self-employed. In the partial unemployment scheme (Activité partielle), workers receive 70% of their gross hourly wage (approximately 84% of the net hourly wage) for up to 12 months, renewed once.

GERMANY



Sick leave: Quarantined workers are covered by six weeks of sick leave.

Wage and income support: Wages are protected through Kurzarbeit for 60% of the salary, including for self-employed. One-off payment of EUR 9,000-15,000 for supporting microenterprises. The part-time work scheme 'STW' is extended to temporary agency workers. STW compensation amounts to 60% of the net pay which the employee loses due to the working time reduction (or 67% if the worker has at least one child). STW compensation will be paid if already 10% of the workforce is affected (in contrast to one third in normal times).

IRELAND



Sick leave: The government provides EUR 305 a week for two weeks for sick leave, and employers are encouraged to pay the difference to ensure 100% of salaries are covered.

Income support: Wages are protected through unemployment benefits for EUR 203 a week, including for self-employed workers.

Wage support: Employees who are on short-time work as a consequence of a reduction in business activity can apply for short-time work benefits for a maximum of 234 days.

NEW ZEALAND



Sick leave: Sick leave with full salary guarantee is available to state employees, and private sector workers have a guarantee for 80% under the COVID-19 Leave Subsidy with a maximum of NZD 585.80/week for full time employees. Sick leave covers illness, quarantine, and leave taken to care for COVID-impacted dependents and all workers under different schemes, including the self-employed.

Wage support: The COVID-19 Wage Subsidy is open to all employers to apply for on proof of 30% drop in revenue and endeavours to maintain 80% of the employee's pre-COVID-19 wage. Salaries are guaranteed 100% for the state sector and 80% for the private sector up to NZD 7,029.6 per month for a full-time worker.

Loan relief: New Zealand is considering six-month mortgage holidays for homeowners under the NZD 6.5 billion financial guarantee to affected households and units, and there is free public transport from 24 March.

NORWAY



Sick leave: Workers are guaranteed 100% wages during sick leave up to one year with no maximum amount. The employer pays the first 16 days. After a year, other social security measures take over. The protections are extended to the self-employed. There is 20 days of extended leave for parents (or even 40 days in case one of the children is sick).

Wage support: Income is protected between 62-80% when the worker is laid off, depending on wages (the lower the wages, the higher the rate of replacement), and is paid by the state.

Income support: There is temporary agreement that self-employed and freelancers are entitled to a compensation of 80% following a calculation where the income from the past three years is taken into account (up to EUR 600,000). Employees can be temporarily laid-off up to 40% of the week with unemployment benefits for 52 weeks during a period of 18 months.

Loan relief: Postponement of loan payments is possible up to six months, although it is not clear whether the banks are following this regulation.

SINGAPORE



Sick leave: Singapore has full-pay sick leave and hospitalisation up to 60 days for Singaporeans or permanent resident workers covered by the Employment Act.

Wage and income support: There are wage protection measures guaranteeing 80%, capped at SGD 3,600 for three months. (1) Self-employed on leave of absence or stay home notice get SGD 100/day for 14 days. (2) Strengthened welfare to low-income families: (A) cash pay-out of SGD 300, 200 or 100 to all aged 21 and above based on three categories of income level; (B) SGD 100 to parents with children aged 20 and below; (C) top-up 20% of the Workfare Income Supplement SGD 100-480 to entitled workers formal and informal included; (D) top-up shopping voucher Passion Card SGD 100 for all aged above 50; (E) grocery vouchers of SGD 100 to residents aged above 21 in one-to-two-roomed public housing flats; (F) rebated 100% top up in GST voucher for households in one-to-two-roomed public housing flats; (G) rebates of 1.5-3.5 months of Service and Conservancy Charges to households in one-to-two-roomed public housing flats; (H) cash out SGD 1,280 to households in three-roomed public housing flats; (I) cash out of SGD 1,780 to households in five-room public housing flats of combined monthly income SGD 6,500 various amount. There is 14 days' wage protection for the self-employed on leave or stay-home notice.

SWEDEN



Sick leave: Workers can stay on sick leave during April and May.

Wage and income support: There is wage protection for short-term layoffs covering 90% of salaries until the end of 2020, including for platform workers and other self-employed. There are special part-time work arrangements: (1) employees working 80% of their usual hours receive 90% of their usual wage, 80% of this to be paid by the employer and 10% by the government; (2) employees working 60% of their usual hours receive 85% of their wage, 65% paid by the employer and 20% by the government; (3) those working 40% of usual hours paid 80% of their wage, 50% paid by the employer and 30% by the government.

UK



Sick leave: Additional days off are granted compensated by GBP 73.10 a week.

Wage support: Wage protection measures, up to 80% of salaries, for isolated or suspended work, although it only covers employees and those rostered-on under zero-hours contracts. In addition, the state will reimburse 80% of furloughed workers wage costs, up to a cap of GBP 2,500 per month for three months' maximum.

Income support: Self-employed workers can claim up to 80% of earnings based on 2019 tax return, but those affected have to wait until June to claim up to GBP 2,400 per month.

Loan relief: There are property loan repayment exemptions for those in difficulty.