



MINISTRY OF
MANPOWER



9th ASEAN Labour Inspection Conference

“Strengthening Labour Inspection Capability in the Post COVID-19 Era”

Virtual, 27-28 May 2021

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Singapore – the Ministry of Manpower, in collaboration with the Regional Centre for the Future of Work (RCFW) – organised the 9th ASEAN Labour Inspection Conference (ALIC) virtually from 27 to 28 May 2021. The Conference was attended by all ASEAN Member States and its nominated employers’ and workers’ organisations, alongside representatives from the ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC), ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE), the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI) and the ASEAN Secretariat.

Adopting the theme “*Strengthening Labour Inspection Capability in the Post COVID-19 Era*”, the Conference discussed strategies and measures to strengthen labour inspections against the backdrop of the changing world of work, exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Other than highlighting the macro-level impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference emphasised the urgent need to expand the activities and functions of the labour inspectorate to include the prevention and control of pandemics such as COVID-19 at the workplaces and to manage the mental well-being of the workforce. Participants also shared their views and best practices on addressing labour challenges and seizing opportunities in the post COVID-19 era.

The Conference acknowledged that all labour inspectors play an important role to enable employers and workers to respond quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic. Efforts will now need to go beyond traditional levers, such as existing labour laws and enforcement, to ensure compliance with new and emerging issues. Labour inspectors also help to bridge the gap between public health and occupational health policies and practices by putting in place new compliance requirements that may not be needed in other traditional workplace risks.

The Conference underlined that tackling the challenges of the pandemic would require the collective efforts of governments, employers, workers, and other stakeholders. Labour inspectorates, in particular, play a key role.

A. Strengthen the Labour Inspection System for Better Workplace Pandemic Preparedness

The Conference called for a strengthening of the functions and activities of the labour inspectorate, especially in times of a pandemic. Governments need to ensure that they continue to be effective in discharging their primary inspectorate duties and contribute to good governance at workplaces. This would necessitate a good understanding of the priorities in the post-COVID era, and a review of the competencies of labour inspectors to meet these new challenges. To this end, ASEAN Member States resolved to:

1. **Tighten the nexus between public health consideration and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies to combat infectious disease management at workplaces.** Most OSH regulatory regimes already require employers to take preventive measures to protect their employees against harmful effects of infectious agents. Nevertheless it is opportune for labour authorities to incorporate public health aspects into their modus operandi.
2. **Strengthen the institutional capacities of labour inspectorates in infectious diseases management.** This can be done by reviewing training and competency frameworks with the view to augment such capabilities. Cross-sharing of information and data between public health and labour inspectorates can also help prioritise workplaces for inspections so as to prevent formation of infectious disease cluster at the workplaces.
3. **Formalise guidance to support employers to develop measures for workplace pandemic preparedness.** The guidance ought to cover both preventive and reactive measures. Preventive measures include incorporating infectious disease management into workplace risk assessments, controls, implementation and continuous review. Reactive measures include business continuity plans as well as response measures if employees are infected.

B. Manage the Mental Well-Being of Our Workforce

The Conference called for better support of mental health at the workplace. The widespread introduction of work-from-home arrangements has led to blurring of work-life boundaries, introducing additional stressors for employees. Mental health is important to both individuals as well as productivity of businesses. To this end, ASEAN Member States resolved to:

4. **Incorporate mental well-being into companies OSH systems and policies.** This is to recognise the importance of mental well-being amongst our workforce. Larger companies can incorporate management of mental well-being as part of their OSH management system, while a simpler template can be developed to cater to the needs of the small and medium enterprises SMEs.

5. **De-stigmatise mental health issues at the workplace.** Employers have the responsibility to recognise that there is a wide continuum of mental illness and not all mental health conditions require medical attention. Leaders who had experienced some mental health issues are also encouraged to share their journey at appropriate platforms. This will help to de-stigmatise the mental health issues and also demonstrate that one can bounce back and retain jobs even if one had suffered some mental health issue before.
6. **Support employers to better manage the well-being of employees.** This could include building employer's capabilities to identify mental well-being issues (e.g. training supervisors, HR officers, OSH officers and company doctors.) and initiatives to promote mental well-being for the workforce. There could be guidelines on how companies can set clear expectations on, but not limited to, on after-office hours work, flexibility during work-from-home arrangements, and communication norms. These measures will help create a supportive work environment that is conducive for mental well-being.

C. Involve Regional Tripartite Partners and International Organizations

The Conference emphasised the need to strengthen the collective response to future pandemics and warned that new diseases in the future could be more infectious, deadly and easily mutated. It is therefore important to involve and collaborate with key stakeholders like the tripartite partners and international organisations. To this end, ASEAN Member States resolved to:

7. **Strengthen tripartite relations, based on a climate of trust and responsibility, through regular social dialogue.** Collaboration and cooperation amongst social partners will help to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the economy, businesses and workers, e.g. tripartite consensus on measures to protect against COVID-19 and responsible cost-cutting measures.
8. **Increase cooperation between ASEAN, Dialogue Partners and other external partners.** The partners may include, but not limited to, the ILO, WHO and IALI. Such cooperation and support will facilitate sharing of approaches, best practices, and experiences in tackling the effects of the pandemic in various ASEAN Member States and shaping the transformation of labour inspection.

D. Deepen Collaboration among AMS

9. **Increase regional coordination and collaboration among labour inspectorates and other stakeholders across ASEAN Member States.** This is necessary to build capacity to adapt to evolving challenges the pandemic imposes on the workplaces. This could include sharing of best practices and strategies to tackle the effects of the pandemic among ASEAN Member States.

The participants extended their appreciation to the Ministry of Manpower and Government of the Republic of Singapore for taking the lead to organise the 9th ALIC. The participants also extended their appreciation to the ASEAN Secretariat, ILO, WHO, IALI, as well as RCFW, for their support to the Conference, and representatives of the tripartite partners for taking part actively in the Conference.

The participants noted that the 10th ALIC will be hosted by Brunei Darussalam, tentatively in December 2021.
