

# *Country Fact Sheet: The Bahamas*

## **Decent Work Response to the Global Financial and Economic Crisis**

*The 98th session of the International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization held in June 2009, in Geneva, Switzerland, adopted a “Global Jobs Pact” as its response to the global economic and jobs crisis. The Pact is a joint commitment made by the Governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations to work together to weather the crisis through policies in line with the Decent Work Agenda. Measures to retain persons in employment, to sustain enterprises and to accelerate employment creation and jobs recovery combined with social protection systems, are addressed in the Global Jobs Pact.*

*Already countries of the Caribbean region have been responding to the crisis and adopting measures in line with the Decent Work Agenda - measures in job creation and social protection, underpinned by social dialogue and international labour standards. In an effort to share experiences and good practices, the ILO Subregional Office for the Caribbean invited its constituents to provide information on their responses to the crisis in their respective countries and territories. The information contained in this fact sheet was collected through a questionnaire which was sent to tripartite constituents. It provides a snapshot of decent work responses of The Bahamas to the ongoing economic and jobs crisis. This fact sheet was prepared in July 2009. The ILO Subregional Office for the Caribbean wishes to thank the respondents for their cooperation in providing the relevant information. It will be updated periodically, based on additional contributions from the tripartite constituents.<sup>1</sup>*

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### **A. Job Creation and Training**

In an effort to cushion the impact of the economic crisis, the Government of The Bahamas embarked on several employment initiatives including intensive road works, a country beautification programme, and the upgrade of the Sir Lynden Pindling International Airport all totalling about US\$250 million with the view to creating jobs for persons displaced by the economic crisis. Additionally, after extensive consultation, a collaborative effort between the Government, business community, trade unions, and the Churches will provide training to 1,000 Bahamians, in occupations where there are strong demands from the business sector and where participants are likely to secure jobs. These occupations include the following: masonry; carpentry; welding; tile laying; electrical; accounting; diesel mechanic; agriculture/farming; landscaping; data processing; computer skills; day care assistant; and housekeeping.

Mindful of the difficulty faced by small entrepreneurs in accessing financing for setting up and expanding businesses, the Government of the Bahamas is establishing a microfinance fund to provide “seed money” to such persons for enterprise development and technical and vocational training activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Inputs for this fact sheet have been provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Development.

## **B. Social Dialogue and International Labour Standards**

- a. A tripartite committee consisting of all of the umbrella trade unions and the employer's organizations has been established to oversee the training initiative.
- b. Pursuant to the provisions of collective agreements, the unions have arrived at consensus with employers to reduce the work week in some instances, and in other instances agreed to adjust hours to reflect the downturn in business.
- c. The national tripartite consultative committee, known as TRIFOR, which was re-established in 2007, meets monthly to discuss issues of national concern. This will include matters relating to the ongoing crisis.

## **C. Social Protection**

- a. The Government of The Bahamas has moved to soften the impact of the recession on persons who have lost their jobs by paying unemployment benefits under the National Insurance Scheme, funded in the amount of US\$20 million from the National Insurance Board (NIB). Individuals receive US\$250.00 every two weeks for a period of 13 weeks.
- b. The Government of The Bahamas has increased the amount of assistance offered through the various social programmes. Bahamians have received such assistance for rent, utilities, food and medical bills. Individuals who qualify for assistance include the unemployed and families without any source of income.
- c. Various tax incentives and relief have also been extended to micro, small and medium enterprises (e.g. a reduction in property tax; excise tax rate on numerous products; and duty and excise tax free import on construction materials).