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A woman wearing a blue garment and a straw hat is shown from the chest up. A digital wireframe overlay, resembling a globe or a network, is superimposed over her face and hat. The background is a solid blue color with a subtle pattern of small white dots and lines.

WHAT WORKS PROMOTING PATHWAYS TO DECENT WORK

STUDIES ON GROWTH WITH EQUITY

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What works: Promoting pathways to decent work

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FOREWORD

This synthesis report presents the main findings from a multi-year research project conducted by the ILO to assess how income support and active labour market policies (ALMPs) can come together to improve the employment and life trajectories of workers, particularly in emerging and developing countries. The research question was derived from an earlier ILO project entitled “Active labour market policies in Latin America and the Caribbean” (www.ilo.org/almp-americas), specifically from the project’s conclusion that, while ALMPs are indeed able to improve workers’ labour market prospects, the success of such interventions hinges on their accessibility. In several cases, a critical missing piece seemed to be adequate income support, which appeared to be a prerequisite for workers in the region to participate fully in activation programmes. The purpose of the present report is thus to shed light on how approaches based on a combination of income support and active support can be used to respond effectively to contemporary labour market challenges in developing and emerging economies.

The report is being issued at a time when governments are faced with the challenge of creating better quality employment opportunities in a world where rapid changes are compounding long standing labour market problems. In this respect, the report shows that the policy combinations studied can make a difference, even in the challenging context of contemporary labour markets. The new evidence presented indicates that the joint implementation of ALMPs and income support measures, if organized properly, can achieve the dual aim of protecting workers while improving their access to decent work. Multiple policy combinations are possible, and so it is important to identify the factors that determine the success (or otherwise) of such an integrated approach, particularly in emerging and developing countries, where labour markets are characterized by high rates of underemployment and informality.

The report (and the project behind it) builds on a multidisciplinary conceptual framework and on an extensive empirical analysis conducted using

a number of methods, including a literature review, a cross-country mapping, a comparative macroeconomic study, and two case studies based on microeconomic impact evaluations and qualitative research. The first case study looks at the unemployment benefit scheme of Mauritius, which combines unemployment benefits with mandatory participation in various activation measures; the second deals with Uruguay's National Social Emergency Response Plan (PANES), which combined cash transfers with voluntary participation in public works. The report is intended for a general readership; more technical details and accompanying materials related to the parent project can be found on the ILO website (www.ilo.org/pathways-decent-work).

A central objective of this project was to provide member States with research that is relevant from a policy perspective – research that promotes debate on “what works?” and helps improve labour market and social conditions for women and men. Accordingly, the project team held consultations with government officials, representatives of workers’ and employers’ organizations, national statistical institutes and the entities responsible for administering the programmes studied, and also with United Nations specialized agencies, universities and research centres. This constant dialogue was essential to ensure that the research reflected the socio-economic contexts in which the various policies were designed and implemented. The consultations were facilitated by relevant ILO Regional and Country Offices, which provided unflagging support during all phases of preparation of the report and its accompanying materials.

We hope that this report will stimulate the debate on “what works?” and help policy-makers understand better how labour market interventions can address employment and social issues around the globe. The world of work is undergoing momentous transformation. The way in which governments and other institutions respond to current and future changes will play a decisive role in the creation of new opportunities for decent work and sustainable development.

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