



The 8<sup>th</sup> Seychelles-European Union Political Dialogue was held on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at the Eden Blue Hotel, Mahe, Seychelles. The Political Dialogue is organized yearly under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement which promotes cooperation, trade and political dialogue between European Union and Small Island States.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs was represented at the meeting by Minister Patricia Francourt, Mr. Jules Baker, Principal Secretary for Employment, Mrs. Linda William-Melanie, Principal Secretary for Social Affairs and Ms. Brenda Morin, Chief Executive Officer of the Agency for Social Protection.

In her Address, Minister Francourt presented various interventions that the Ministry have undertaken to mitigate the social impacts of COVID-19 on workers and families.

From an employment perspective, the Minister stated that the increase in the National Unemployment rate by a 1% point was minimal but the challenges remain with an increase in youth unemployment from 7.4% in 2019 to 12 % in 2020 and informal employment which was around 15% in 2020. The legal and policy interventions pointed out by the Minister were;

- Amendments to the Labour legislation regulating the deferment of payment of wages and wage reductions.
- Introduction of Seychelles Employee Transition Scheme (SETS) providing financial support to workers made redundant.
- Extension of two employment programmes – The My First Job Scheme (MFJ) and the Skills Development Programme (SDP). Firstly, for MFJ Scheme, allowed youths who completed their post-secondary and tertiary education to enroll on internship programmes within Government and private sector to acquire work-based experience and skills to facilitate access to full time employment. Secondly to extend Skills Development Programme for job seekers above 30 years of age to provide for reskilling and retraining opportunities for workers made redundant and self employed who lost their daily livelihood to be upskilled or gain alternative skills to move in other growth sectors. Both programmes were fully funded by Government.

The Minister emphasized that the interventions have been successful in view that many job seekers have secured employment. She also noted that redundancies have reduced considerably due to improved business confidence as a result of opening of national and international borders.

In respect of the other social dimensions of the impact of Covid 19, concerns were on food deprivation during quarantine and the increase in spousal violence and different forms of abuse that were reported. The Minister highlighted that Social Services remained on alert to provide assistance and to offer psychosocial support in the form of e-counselling to families in distress. Social Services collaborated with NGO's to provide basic provisions to individuals to minimize food deprivation.

The Agency for Social Protection re-strategized its scope of work to better assist citizens. The Minister reflected on the 253% increase in applications for welfare in 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2020 that has considerably reduced by 90% in same period of 2021, the result of efficient synergies within the Ministry to get people from welfare assistance to work as the country's economy started to pick up.

To conclude, the Minister emphasized on the continuous and intensified efforts of the Ministry and the Government of Seychelles to ensure a stable labour market, facilitate ease of doing business as well as provide safety nets for families in need for the continued development of the economy.

The EU conveyed their appreciation of the efforts of the Ministry and the Government.



END