



International
Labour
Organization

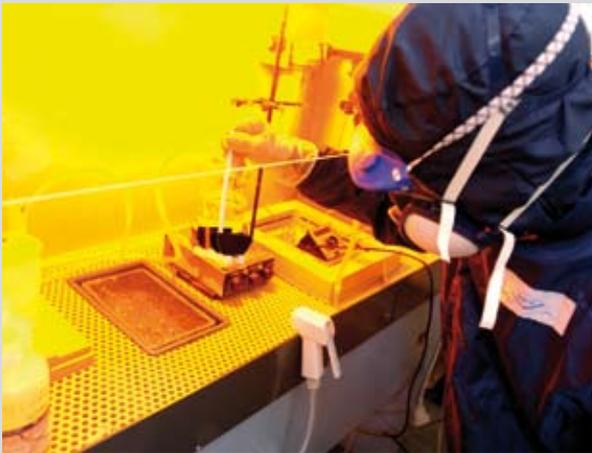


The ILO at a glance



"Universal and lasting **peace** can be established only if it is based on **social justice**."

ILO Constitution, 1919



THE ILO AT A GLANCE

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations agency devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue in handling work-related issues.

The ILO is the only “tripartite” United Nations agency in that it brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes.

The ILO is the global body responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards. Working with its 181 member States, the ILO seeks to ensure that labour standards are respected in practice as well as principle.

Past...

The ILO was created in 1919, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice. The ILO's founders were committed to spreading humane working conditions and combating injustice, hardship and poverty. In 1944, during another period of international crisis, ILO members built on these aims by adopting the *Declaration of Philadelphia*, which states that labour is not a commodity and sets out basic human and economic rights under the principle that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere".

The ILO in 1946 became the first specialized agency associated with the newly formed United Nations. On its 50th anniversary in 1969, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The vast expansion in the number of countries belonging to the ILO in the decades after World War II brought much change. The organization launched technical assistance programmes to provide expertise and assistance to governments, workers and employers worldwide, especially in developing nations. In countries such as Poland, Chile and South Africa, the ILO's strong support for trade union rights helped in the fight for democracy and freedom.



...to Present

Another important date for the ILO was 1998, when delegates to the International Labour Conference adopted the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. These principles and rights are the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining and the elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination linked to employment. The guarantee of these fundamental principles and rights at work, according to the Declaration, is important because it enables people “to claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity, their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate and to achieve fully their human potential”.



Decent Work...

Work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, hinges on work that is decent.

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. Decent work means better prospects for personal development and social integration, and freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. It entails equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Decent work is the key to the eradication of poverty. If women and men have access to decent work, they can share in the gains brought by increased international economic integration. Extending opportunities for decent work to more people is a crucial element in making globalization more inclusive and fair. Creating decent employment must therefore be at the heart of development policy.



...in a Globalizing World

In 2004, the role of the ILO in promoting strategies for a fair globalization was backed by the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization.

The drive to foster decent work spans the ILO, integrating what the organization does at international, regional, national and local levels. In bringing together governments, employers and workers to set labour standards, supervise their implementation, raise awareness, develop policies and devise programmes, the ILO aims to ensure that its efforts are rooted in the needs of working women and men.

The ILO works actively with the UN and other multilateral agencies to develop policies and programmes that support the creation of decent work opportunities as a central plank of efforts to reduce and eradicate poverty.



SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Underlying the ILO's work is the importance of cooperation between governments and employers' and workers' organizations in fostering social and economic progress. Dialogue between the governments and the two "social partners" promotes consensus-building and democratic involvement of those with vital stakes in the world of work.

This "social dialogue" can mean negotiation, consultation or simply an exchange of views between representatives of employers, workers and governments. It may consist of relations between labour and management, with or without direct government involvement. Social dialogue is a flexible tool that enables governments and employers' and workers' organizations to manage change and achieve economic and social goals.

The very structure of the ILO, where workers and employers together have an equal voice with governments in the work of its governing councils, shows social dialogue in action. It ensures that the views of the social partners are closely reflected in ILO labour standards, policies and programmes.



Social Dialogue is a flexible tool for achieving economic and social **change**.

At the same time, the ILO helps governments and employers' and workers' organizations establish sound labour relations, adapt labour laws to changing economic and social circumstances and improve labour administration. In supporting and reinforcing employers' and workers' organizations, the ILO helps to create the conditions for effective dialogue with governments and with each other.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICYMAKING

The ILO's broad policies are set by the International Labour Conference, which meets once a year and brings together the organization's constituents. The Conference also adopts new international labour standards and approves the ILO's work plan and budget.

Between sessions of the Conference, the ILO is guided by its Governing Body, which is composed of 28 government members, 14 employer members and 14 worker members. The ILO's Secretariat, the International Labour Office, has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland and maintains field offices in more than 40 countries.

In 1999, Juan Somavia of Chile became the ILO's ninth Director-General. He is the first person from the Southern Hemisphere to head the organization.



STANDARDS

Since its early days, the ILO has sought to define and guarantee labour rights and improve conditions for working people by building a system of international labour standards expressed in the form of Conventions, Recommendations and Codes of Practice.

The ILO has since adopted more than 180 ILO Conventions and 190 Recommendations covering all aspects of the world of work. This body of international labour law was recently reviewed by the Governing Body which determined that more than 70 of the Conventions adopted before 1985 remained fully up to date and the remainder required revision or withdrawal. In addition, dozens of Codes of Practice have been developed. In areas as varied as maternity leave and protection of migrants, these standards play an important role in the drawing up of national legislation. A supervisory process helps to ensure that standards ratified by individual member States are applied and the ILO provides advice in the drafting of national labour laws.

With the adoption of the *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* in 1998, ILO member States decided to uphold a set of core labour standards regardless of whether they had ratified the relevant conventions. These are basic human rights and a central plank of decent work.



Core labour standards are a central plank of **decent work**

Freedom of Association

Freedom of Association is a building block for **social and economic progress**

The right of workers and employers to form and join organizations of their choice is an integral part of a free and open society. It is a basic civil liberty that serves as a building block for social and economic progress. Linked to this is the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining. Voice and representation are an important part of decent work.

The existence of independent organizations for workers and employers serves as a foundation to the ILO's tripartite structure, and their involvement in ILO actions and policies reinforces freedom of association, directly and indirectly. From advising governments on labour legislation to providing education and training for trade unions and employer groups, the ILO is regularly engaged in promoting freedom of association.

The ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association was set up in 1951 to examine violations of workers' and employers' organizing rights. The committee has examined more than 2,000 cases, including allegations of murders, disappearances, physical attacks, arrests and forced exile of trade union officials. The committee is tripartite and handles complaints in ILO member States whether or not they have ratified freedom of association conventions.

Through the Committee on Freedom of Association and other supervisory mechanisms, the ILO has frequently defended rights of trade unions and employers' organizations. In many cases, these organizations have played a significant role in their countries' democratic transformation.



Forced Labour

An estimated minimum of at least 12 million people worldwide are victims of forced labour. Of those, 10 million are exploited by forced labour in the private economy, rather than that imposed directly by states. The ILO estimates that US\$32 billion in annual profits are generated by the forced labour of trafficked people.

Forced labour takes different forms, including debt bondage, trafficking and other forms of modern slavery. The most vulnerable victims are women and girls forced into prostitution, migrants trapped in debt bondage, and sweatshop or farm workers kept there by clearly illegal tactics and paid little or nothing.

The ILO has worked since its inception to tackle forced labour and the conditions that give rise to it and has established a Special Action Programme on Forced Labour to intensify this effort. In partnership with workers, employers, civil society and other international organizations, the ILO seeks to address all aspects of forced labour. These range from preventive measures including livelihood improvement projects in communities where trafficking victims originate, to support for freed workers. Programmes can include microfinance, training opportunities and facilitating access to education.

The ILO is also pressing for effective national laws and stronger enforcement mechanisms, such as legal sanctions and vigorous prosecution against those who exploit forced labourers. By raising public awareness, the ILO seeks to shine a spotlight on such human and labour rights violations.



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Child Labour

Child labour is on the **decline** globally

There are more than 200 million children working throughout the world, many full-time. They are deprived of adequate education, good health and basic freedoms. Of these, 126 million – or one in every 12 children worldwide – are exposed to hazardous forms of child labour, work that endangers their physical, mental or moral well-being.

Over the past 15 years, the world has awakened to child labour as a pressing social, economic and human rights issue. Today, child labour globally is on the decline, and if this trend continues, its worst forms may be eliminated in the coming decade. This is the direct result of a powerful international movement to eliminate child labour.

This movement is reflected in the unprecedented pace with which countries are ratifying the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention. Adopted in 1999, the Convention has been ratified by nine out of every 10 of the ILO's 181 member States. Similarly, the ILO's Minimum Age Convention adopted in 1973 has now been ratified by four out of five ILO member States.

The ILO has been a principal engine behind this growing movement. The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), launched in 1992, now encompasses activities in over 80 countries. As with other aspects of decent work, eliminating child labour is a development as well as human rights issue. ILO policies and programmes aim to help ensure that children receive the education and training they need to become productive adults in decent employment.



Discrimination

Hundreds of millions of people suffer from discrimination in the world of work. This not only violates a most basic human right, but has wider social and economic consequences. Discrimination stifles opportunities, wasting the human talent needed for economic progress and accentuating social tensions and inequalities. Combating discrimination is an essential part of promoting decent work, and success on this front is felt well beyond the workplace.

Issues linked to discrimination are present throughout the ILO's sphere of work. By bolstering freedom of association, for example, the ILO seeks to prevent discrimination against trade union members and officials.

Programmes to fight forced labour and child labour include helping girls and women trapped in prostitution or coercive domestic labour. Non-discrimination is a main principle in the ILO's code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work. ILO guidelines on labour law include provisions on discrimination.

At the same time, gender equality is integrated into all ILO activities. This reflects the persistent and varied problems faced by women in the labour market. Women continue to earn less than men, dominating low-paid and less-protected occupations and accounting for the majority of workers in informal, atypical and unpaid situations. The ILO works to expand employment opportunities for women, enhance conditions of employment and eliminate gender discrimination. It encourages women's entrepreneurship through support services, business development, training, microfinance and documentation of good practices. And it helps workers' organizations defend and expand the rights of women at the workplace and promote their role in trade unions and society at large.



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EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

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With global unemployment at historically high levels, there has never been a greater need to put employment at the centre of economic and social policies. Even among those who work, the extent of poverty underscores the need for a far greater number of productive and decent jobs.

The insufficient pace in creating decent work worldwide points to the need for greater international coordination of macro-economic policies, as well as active labour market policies at the national level.

Productive and freely chosen employment is at the core of the ILO's mandate, and the organization is committed to full employment. The ILO identifies policies that help create and maintain decent work and income – policies that are formulated in a comprehensive Global Employment Agenda worked out by the three ILO constituents. The organization carries out research and takes part in international discussion of employment strategies.



The ILO is particularly concerned about the massive unemployment of young women and men – nearly half the world’s unemployed are young people – and it seeks to help them and their governments through policy advice and concrete training and employment initiatives.

The ILO has pioneered analysis and action on the informal economy. This term is used to describe work done beyond the reach of formal laws and enforcement mechanisms. In many developing countries, more than half of the non-agricultural workforce is in the informal economy. Most women in these countries work informally often as street traders. Informal work is mostly unproductive, insecure, poorly remunerated and done under adverse conditions. Helping employers and workers to move out of informality requires comprehensive strategies to raise skills and productivity, improve laws and their application and foster self-support institutions.

Periodic ILO publications including *Key Indicators of the Labour Market* analyse trends and provide extensive statistical data.

The ILO provides technical support and advice in areas ranging from training and skills to microfinance and small business development.

It has advised countries making the transition from centrally planned to market economies on employment, labour market and human resource policies. The organization also works to promote employment-intensive investment in developing countries.



Wages and Other Conditions of Employment

While wages may rise in many countries, they often remain too low for many workers to meet their basic needs. And while some workers may see decreases in the time they devote to work, the accompanying unpredictability can weaken job security and pose new difficulties for reconciling work and family. Dirty and dangerous working conditions, on the decline in industrialized countries, are still prevalent in the developing world. Meanwhile, job related stress and violence are starting to be recognized globally as major problems.

Wages, working time, work organization, working conditions and adapting working life to the demands of life outside work are core elements of the employment relationship and of workers' protection, as well as key dimensions of economic performance, and thus are of principal interest to the ILO. These issues are major components of human resources management, collective bargaining and social dialogue, as well as of government policies.



SOCIAL PROTECTION

Most men and women do not have adequate levels of social protection. They face dangers in the workplace and poor or non-existent pension and health insurance coverage. Some are not allowed sufficient rest times and many women lack maternity benefits. International labour standards and the UN recognize social protection as a basic human right. Moreover, well-designed social security systems improve economic performance, contributing to competitiveness. The ILO is committed to helping countries extend social protection to all groups in society and to improving working conditions and safety at work.



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Social Security

Only 20 per cent of the world's population have adequate social security coverage, and more than half lack any coverage at all. The situation reflects levels of economic development, with fewer than 10 per cent of workers in least-developed countries covered by social security. In middle-income countries, coverage ranges from 20 to 60 per cent, while in most industrial nations, it is close to 100 per cent.

Social security involves access to health care and income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a main income earner.

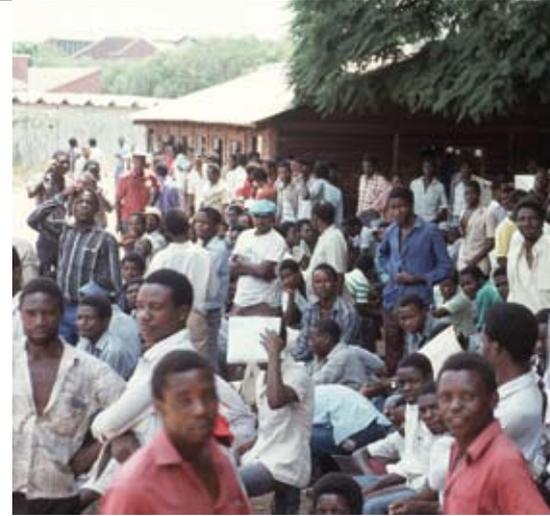
Concern among governments, employers and workers led the ILO to launch a "Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All" in 2003. The campaign builds on ILO efforts already underway in more than 30 countries. These include projects to help countries extend coverage at the national level and to strengthen community-based social security organizations. The ILO is also doing important research to identify factors that undermine security among people in the developing and developed world.



International Migration

Close to half of all migrants and refugees worldwide — or some 86 million adults — are economically active, employed or otherwise engaged in remunerative activity. And the number of migrants crossing borders in search of employment and human security is expected to increase rapidly in the coming decades due to the failure of globalization to provide jobs and economic opportunities. Strict immigration controls and barriers imposed by major receiving countries have led to a number of issues of concern, including a high incidence of abuse and exploitation of migrant workers in host societies.

The ILO sees today's global challenge as forging the policies and the resources to manage labour migration better so that it contributes positively to the growth and development of both home and host societies, as well as to the well being of the migrants themselves.



Health and Safety

The ILO places special importance on developing and applying a **preventive safety and health culture** in workplaces **worldwide**

Every year, more than 2 million people die from occupational accidents or work-related diseases. By conservative estimates, there are 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million cases of occupational disease.

The safety of work varies enormously between countries, economic sectors and social groups. Deaths and injuries take a particularly heavy toll in developing nations, where large numbers of people are engaged in hazardous activities such as agriculture, construction, logging, fishing and mining. Throughout the world, the poorest and least protected – often women, children and migrants – are among the most affected.

Given the progress that many industrialized countries have made in reducing serious injuries, it is clear that improvements in workplace safety yield results. Yet there is a lack of awareness, knowledge and information about the issue. The ILO works to fill this gap through research, advocacy and technical assistance. It helps countries develop management tools, monitoring and information services, with the primary focus on hazardous occupations.

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HIV/AIDS

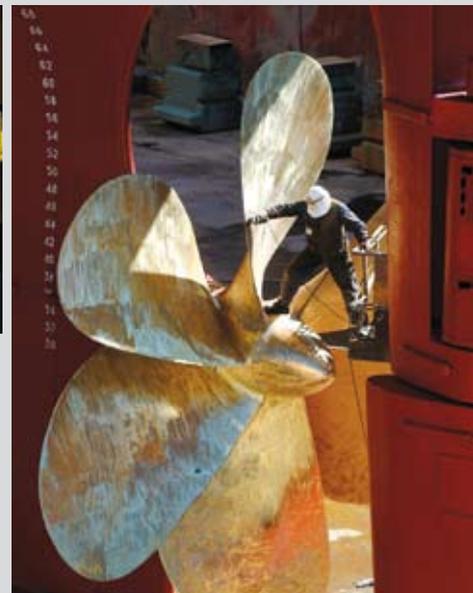
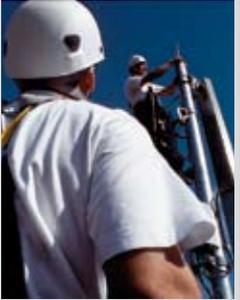
In a relatively short period, the pandemic of HIV/AIDS has become one of the most critical workplace issues in our time. Nearly 40 million people of working age have HIV and the global labour force has lost an estimated 28 million workers to AIDS since the start of the epidemic 20 years ago.

In addition to the epidemic's devastating impact on these women and men and their families, it affects the world of work in many ways. For example, discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS threatens fundamental rights at work, undermining opportunities for people to obtain decent employment.

Following consultations among governments, employers and workers, the ILO in 2001 adopted a Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work.

The pioneering Code is designed to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS while managing and mitigating its workplace impact. Among the Code's key principles are non-discrimination, gender equality, a healthy working environment, no HIV testing for purposes of employment, confidentiality and the continuation of the employment relationship. Increasingly, the code is serving as a reference point for employers and trade unions negotiating agreements on handling HIV/AIDS in the world of work.







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