



International
Labour
Office

RULES OF THE GAME

A brief introduction
to International
Labour Standards

Revised Edition 2014

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A brief introduction to
International Labour Standards

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FOREWORD

Rules of the Game: a brief introduction to International Labour Standards was first published in 2005 to help the ILO's traditional constituents, but also non-specialists and the general public, to better understand the essence of the ILO Conventions and Recommendations, the application and supervision of international labour standards, and their importance in the global economy. It was revised for a first time in 2009 when a second edition was published. It was deemed appropriate to revise the second edition, in particular to integrate recently adopted instruments, including the HIV and AIDS Recommendation of 2010, the Domestic Workers Convention of 2011, the Social Protection Floors Recommendation of 2012 and the 2014 Protocol and Recommendation to tackle modern forms of forced labour. It was also important to take into account the entry into force of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as well as to put into perspective the key role international labour standards can play in the context of the ongoing employment crisis. It is to be hoped that this new edition, which also coincides with the ILO's 95th anniversary, will translate into an even wider dissemination of the Organization's standards-related activities.

Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry
Director, International Labour Standards Department,
ILO Geneva

Building a global economy with social justice
What are international labour standards?
How are international labour standards created?
How are international labour standards used?

1

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS: RULES OF THE GAME FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

“Experience shows that economic growth is not sufficient. We must do more to empower individuals through decent work, support people through social protection, and ensure the voices of the poor and marginalized are heard. As we continue our efforts to achieve the Millenium Development Goals and shape a post-2015 development agenda, let us make social justice central to achieving equitable and sustainable growth for all.¹”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
Message for the World Day of Social Justice,
20 February 2014

Since 1919, the International Labour Organization has established and developed a system of *international labour standards* aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. In today’s globalized economy, international labour standards are an essential component in the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits to all.

BUILDING A GLOBAL ECONOMY WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE

The aspiration for social justice, through which every working man and woman can claim freely and on the basis of equality of opportunity their fair share of the wealth which they have helped to generate, is as great today as it was when the ILO was created in 1919. The current global economy has grown to a scale unprecedented in history. Aided by new technologies, people, capital and goods are moving between countries with an ease and at a speed that have created an interdependent global economic network affecting virtually every person on the planet.

While globalization has created opportunities and benefits for many, at the same time millions of workers and employers worldwide have had to face new challenges. The globalized economy has displaced workers and enterprises to new locations, resulted in the sudden accumulation or flight of capital, and caused financial instability which in turn led to the 2008 global economic crisis. Despite the clear benefits, globalization has not ushered in an era of prosperity for all. In fact, in spite of strong economic growth that had produced millions of new jobs since the early 1990s until the 2008 crisis, income inequality also grew dramatically in most regions of the world. The personal distribution of wages has become more unequal, with a growing gap between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 10 per cent of wage earners². Moreover, six years after the 2008 economic and social crisis, the global employment situation remains uneven: if certain advanced economies have managed to recover some of the jobs lost, other economies are still confronted with significant challenges with respect to their labour market and social prospects continue to deteriorate. From the economic point of view, indicators show that profitability and stock markets have recovered in the majority of countries. Executive pay is also on the rise, following a pause in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. Therefore, the key issue is how to translate these profits into productive investment³. Over 30 million jobs are still needed to return employment to pre-crisis levels⁴. The fact that the global crisis has had significant negative repercussions for labour markets and that recovery is proving uncertain and elusive has further highlighted the necessity of inclusive growth.



Inequality not only leads to a decline in productivity but also breeds poverty, social instability and even conflict. In view of this, the international community has recognized the need to establish some basic rules of the game to ensure that globalization offers a fair chance at prosperity for everyone.

The ILO *Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization of 2008* and the *Global Job Pact of 2009* both reaffirmed the relevance of the ILO's mandate to promote social justice using all the means available to it, including the promotion of international labour standards.

The role of international labour standards

In 1919, the signatory nations to the Treaty of Versailles created the *International Labour Organization* (ILO) in recognition of the fact that “conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled.” To tackle this problem, the newly founded organization established a system of international labour standards – international Conventions and Recommendations drawn up by representatives of governments, employers and workers from around the world – covering all matters related to work. What the ILO's founders recognized in 1919 was that the global economy needed clear rules in order to ensure that economic progress would go hand in hand with social justice, prosperity and peace for all.

The landmark Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (see section 3), adopted by governments, workers and employers in June 2008, was designed to strengthen the ILO's capacity to promote its *Decent Work Agenda* and forge an effective response to the growing challenges of globalization. The *Decent Work Agenda* which takes up many of the same challenges that the Organization faced at its inception, aims to achieve decent work for all by promoting social dialogue, social protection and employment creation, as well as respect for international labour standards.

International labour standards have grown into a comprehensive system of instruments on work and social policy, backed by a supervisory system designed to address all sorts of problems in their application at the national level. They are the legal component in the ILO's strategy for governing globalization, promoting sustainable development, eradicating poverty, and ensuring that people can work in dignity and safety. *The Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization* underlined that, in order to reach the ILO's objectives in the context of globalization, the Organization must "promote the ILO's standard-setting policy as a cornerstone of ILO activities by enhancing its relevance to the world of work, and ensure the role of standards as a useful means of achieving the constitutional objectives of the Organization".

The challenges of globalization have made international labour standards more relevant than ever. What benefits do they provide today?

A path to decent work

International labour standards are first and foremost about the development of people as human beings. In the ILO's Declaration of Philadelphia of 1944, the international community recognized that "labour is not a commodity". Indeed, labour is not like an apple or a television set, an inanimate product that can be negotiated for the highest profit or the lowest price. Work is part of everyone's daily life and is crucial to a person's dignity, well-being and development as a human being. Economic development should include the creation of jobs and working conditions in which people can work in freedom, safety and dignity. In short, economic development is not undertaken for its own sake but to improve the lives of human beings; international labour standards are there to ensure that it remains focused on improving human life and dignity.

An international legal framework for fair and stable globalization

Achieving the goal of decent work in the globalized economy requires action at the international level. The world community is responding to this challenge in part by developing international legal instruments on trade, finance, environment, human rights and labour. The ILO contributes to this legal framework by elaborating and promoting international labour standards aimed at making sure that economic growth and development go along with the creation of decent work. The ILO's unique tripartite structure ensures that these standards are backed by governments, employers, and workers alike. International labour standards therefore lay down the basic minimum social standards agreed upon by all players in the global economy.

A level playing field

An international legal framework on social standards ensures a level playing field in the global economy. It helps governments and employers to avoid the temptation of lowering labour standards in the belief that this could give them a greater comparative advantage in international trade. In the long run such practices do not benefit anyone. Lowering labour standards can encourage the spread of low-wage, low-skill, and high-turnover industries and prevent a country from developing more stable high-skilled employment, while at the same time making it more difficult for trading partners to develop their economies upwards. Because international labour standards are minimum standards adopted by governments and the social partners, it is in everyone's interest to see these rules applied across the board, so that those who do not put them into practice do not undermine the efforts of those who do.

A means of improving economic performance

International labour standards are sometimes perceived as entailing significant costs and thus hindering economic development. A growing body of research indicates, however, that compliance with international labour standards often accompanies improvements in productivity and economic performance. Higher wage and working time standards and respect for equality can translate into better and more satisfied workers and lower turnover of staff. Investment in vocational training can result in a bet-

tertrained workforce and higher employment levels.⁵ Safety standards can reduce costly accidents and health care fees. Employment protection can encourage workers to take risks and to innovate. Social protection such as unemployment schemes and active labour market policies can facilitate labour market flexibility; they make economic liberalization and privatization sustainable and more acceptable to the public. Freedom of association and collective bargaining can lead to better labour–management consultation and cooperation, thereby reducing the number of costly labour conflicts and enhancing social stability.

The beneficial effects of labour standards do not go unnoticed by foreign investors. Studies have shown that in their criteria for choosing countries in which to invest, foreign investors rank workforce quality and political and social stability above low labour costs. At the same time, there is little evidence that countries which do not respect labour standards are more competitive in the global economy.⁶

A safety net in times of economic crisis

Even fast-growing economies with high-skilled workers can experience unforeseen economic downturns. The Asian financial crisis of 1997, the 2000 Dot-Com Bubble burst and the 2008 financial and economic crisis showed how decades of economic growth could be undone by dramatic currency devaluations or falling market prices. For instance, during the 1997 Asian crisis, as well as the 2008 crisis, unemployment increased significantly in many of the countries affected. The disastrous effects of these crises on workers were compounded by the fact that in many of these countries social protection systems (notably unemployment and health insurance), active labour market policies and social dialogue were non-existent or under tremendous pressure. Taking an approach that balances macroeconomic and employment goals, while at the same time taking social impacts into account, can help to address these challenges.⁷

A strategy for reducing poverty

Economic development has always depended on the acceptance of rules. Legislation and functioning legal institutions ensure property rights, the enforcement of contracts, respect for procedure, and protection from crime – all legal elements of good governance without which no economy

can operate. A market governed by a fair set of rules and institutions is more efficient and brings benefit to everyone. The labour market is no different. Fair labour practices set out in international labour standards and applied through a national legal system ensure an efficient and stable labour market for workers and employers alike.

In many developing and transition economies, a large part of the workforce is active in the informal economy. Moreover, such countries often lack the capacity to provide effective social justice. Yet international labour standards can be effective tools in these situations as well. Most standards apply to all workers, not just those working under formal work arrangements; some standards, such as those dealing with homeworkers, migrant and rural workers, and indigenous and tribal peoples, actually deal specifically with areas of the informal economy. The extension of freedom of association, social protection, occupational safety and health, vocational training, and other measures required by international labour standards have proved to be effective strategies in reducing poverty and bringing workers into the formal economy. Furthermore, international labour standards call for the creation of institutions and mechanisms which can enforce labour rights. In combination with a set of defined rights and rules, functioning legal institutions can help formalize the economy and create a climate of trust and order which is essential for economic growth and development.⁸

The sum of international experience and knowledge

International labour standards are the result of discussions among governments, employers and workers, in consultation with experts from around the world. They represent the international consensus on how a particular labour problem could be tackled at the global level and reflect knowledge and experience from all corners of the world. Governments, employers' and workers' organizations, international institutions, multinational companies and non-governmental organizations can benefit from this knowledge by incorporating the standards in their policies, operational objectives and day-to-day action. The standards' legal character allows them to be used in the legal system and administration at the national level, and as part of the corpus of international law which can bring about greater integration of the international community.

About the ILO

The International Labour Organization was founded in 1919 and became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1946. It currently has 185 member States. The ILO has a unique "tripartite" structure, which brings together representatives of governments, employers, and workers on an equal footing to address issues related to labour and social policy. The ILO's broad policies are set by the **International Labour Conference**, which meets once a year and brings together its constituents. The Conference also adopts new international labour standards and the ILO's work plan and budget.

Between the sessions of the Conference, the ILO is guided by the **Governing Body**, which is composed of 28 government members as well as 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. On its 50th anniversary in 1969, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The current Director-General of the ILO is Guy Ryder. The ILO will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2019.

WHAT ARE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS?

International labour standards are legal instruments drawn up by the ILO's constituents (governments, employers and workers) setting out basic principles and rights at work. They are either *Conventions*, which are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by member States, or *Recommendations*, which serve as non-binding guidelines. In many cases, a Convention lays down the basic principles to be implemented by ratifying countries, while a related Recommendation supplements the Convention by providing more detailed guidelines on how it could be applied. Recommendations can also be autonomous, i.e. not linked to any Convention.

Conventions and Recommendations are drawn up by representatives of governments, employers and workers and are adopted at the ILO's annual International Labour Conference. Once a standard is adopted, member States are required under the ILO Constitution to *submit* them to their competent authority (normally the parliament) for consideration. In the case of Conventions, this means consideration for *ratification*. If it is ratified, a Convention generally comes into force for that country one year after the date of ratification. Ratifying countries commit themselves to applying the Convention in national law and practice and to reporting on its application at regular intervals. Technical assistance is provided by the ILO if necessary. In addition, representation and complaint procedures can be initiated against countries for violations of a Convention they have ratified (see section 3).

Fundamental Conventions

The ILO's Governing Body has identified eight Conventions as "fundamental", covering subjects that are considered as fundamental principles and rights at work: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. These principles are also covered in the ILO's *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (1998) (see section 3). There are currently over 1,357 ratifications of these Conventions, representing 91,7% of the possible number of ratifications. A further 125 ratifications are still required to meet the objective of universal ratification of all the fundamental Conventions by 2015 under the United Nations Development Millennium Goals.

The eight fundamental Conventions are:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

Governance (Priority) Conventions

The ILO's Governing Body has also designated another four Conventions as "priority" instruments, thereby encouraging member States to ratify them because of their importance to the functioning of the international labour standards system. The *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, in its follow-up, underlined the significance from the viewpoint of governance of these Conventions.

The four governance Conventions are:

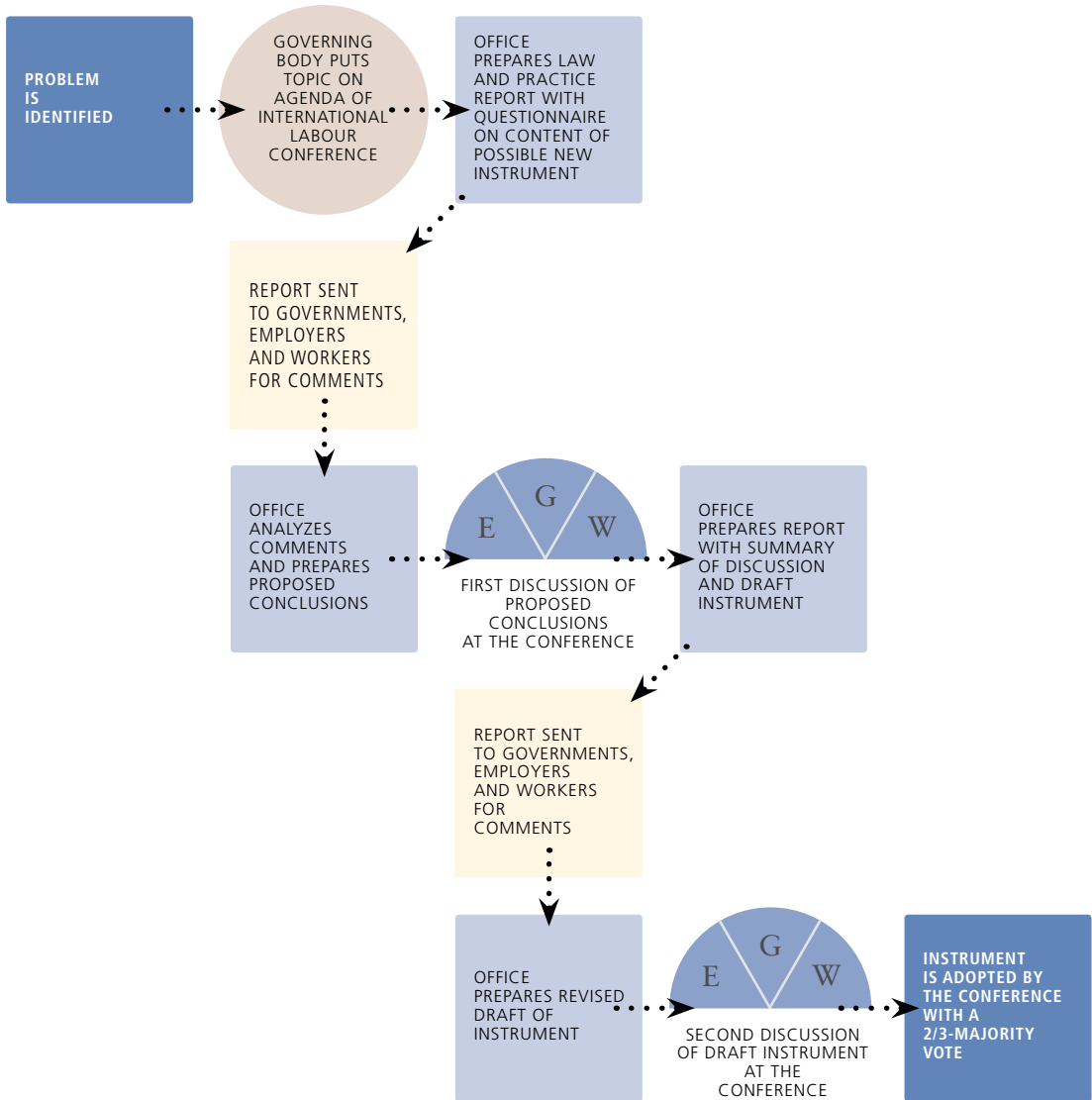
- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)
- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)
- Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)
- Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)

HOW ARE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS CREATED?

International labour standards evolve from a growing international concern that action needs to be taken on a particular issue, for example providing working women with maternity protection, or ensuring safe working conditions for agricultural workers. Developing international labour standards at the ILO is a unique legislative process involving representatives of governments, workers and employers from around the world. As a first step, the Governing Body agrees to put an issue on the agenda of a future International Labour Conference. The International Labour Office prepares a report that analyses the laws and practices of member States with regard to the issue at stake. The report is circulated to member States and to workers' and employers' organizations for comments and is discussed at the International Labour Conference. A second report is then prepared by the Office with a draft instrument for comments and is submitted for discussion at the following Conference, where the draft is amended as necessary and proposed for adoption. This "double discussion" gives Conference participants sufficient time to examine the draft instrument and make comments on it. A two-thirds majority of votes is required for a standard to be adopted.



How an international labour standard is adopted



Who adopts international labour standards?

The International Labour Conference brings together delegations from all ILO member States. Each delegation comprises:

2 government delegates

1 employer delegate

1 worker delegate

Government, employer and worker delegates each have one vote in plenary.

Ratification

ILO member States are required to submit any Convention adopted at the International Labour Conference to their national competent authority for the enactment of relevant legislation or other action, including ratification. An adopted Convention normally comes into force 12 months after being ratified by two member States. Ratification is a formal procedure whereby a state accepts the Convention as a legally binding instrument. Once it has ratified a Convention, a country is subject to the ILO's regular supervisory system responsible for ensuring that the Convention is applied. For more on the ILO's supervisory system, see section 3 of this booklet.

Universality and flexibility

Standards are adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the ILO's constituents and are therefore an expression of universally acknowledged principles. At the same time, they reflect the fact that countries have diverse cultural and historical backgrounds, legal systems, and levels of economic development. Indeed, most standards have been formulated in a manner that makes them flexible enough to be translated into national law and practice with due consideration of these differences. For example, standards on minimum wages do not require member States to set a specific minimum wage but to establish a system and the machinery to fix minimum wage rates appropriate to their economic development. Other standards have so-called "flexibility clauses" allowing states to lay down temporary standards that are lower than those normally prescribed, to exclude certain categories of workers from the application of a Convention, or to apply only certain parts of the instrument. Ratifying countries are usually required to make a declaration to the Director-General of the ILO if they exercise any of the flexibility options, and to make use of such clauses only in consultation with the social partners. Reservations to ILO Conventions, however, are not permitted.

Updating international labour standards

At present, the ILO has adopted 189 Conventions, 203 Recommendations and 6 Protocols, some dating back as far as 1919. As can be expected, some of these instruments no longer correspond to today's needs. To address this problem, the ILO adopts *revising Conventions* that replace older ones, or *Protocols* which add new provisions to older Conventions. The International Labour Conference may approve the *withdrawal* of Recommendations or Conventions which have not entered into force. Between 1995 and 2002 the Governing Body reviewed all ILO standards adopted before 1985, with the exception of the fundamental and governance Conventions, to see if they needed to be revised. As a result of that review, 71 Conventions – including the fundamental Conventions and those adopted after 1985 – were designated as being “up-to-date” and recommended for active promotion. As for the remaining standards, the Governing Body decided that some needed to be revised, some had an interim status, some were outdated, and for some others further information and study were required. Furthermore, in 1997 the International Labour Conference adopted an amendment to the ILO Constitution which would allow for the *abrogation* of a Convention in force but recognized as obsolete, if two-thirds of Conference delegates voted for such a measure. This amendment has been ratified by more than 120 member States and still needs two more ratifications for it to come into force. The ILO constituents are also currently examining the possibility of implementing a standards review mechanism with the objective of ensuring that the ILO has in place a clear and robust body of up-to-date international labour standards that responds to the needs of the world of work, the protection of workers and promotion of sustainable enterprises.

HOW ARE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS USED?

Models and targets for labour law

International labour standards are primarily tools for governments which, in consultation with employers and workers, are seeking to draft and implement labour law and social policy in conformity with internationally accepted standards. For many states, this process begins with a decision to consider ratifying an ILO Convention. Countries often go through a period of examining and, if necessary, revising their legislation and policies in order to achieve compliance with the instrument they wish to ratify. International labour standards thus serve as targets for harmonizing national law and practice in a particular field; the actual ratification might come further along the path of implementing the standard. Some countries decide not to ratify a Convention but bring their legislation into line with it anyway; such countries use ILO standards as models for drafting their law and policy. Others ratify ILO Conventions fairly quickly and then work to bring their national law and practice into line after ratification; the comments of the ILO's supervisory bodies and technical assistance (see section 3) can guide them in this process. For such countries, ratification is the first step on the path to implementing a standard.

Sources of international law applied at the national level

In numerous countries, ratified international treaties apply automatically at the national level. Their courts are thus able to use international labour standards to decide cases on which national law is inadequate or silent, or to draw on definitions set out in the standards, such as “forced labour” or “discrimination”.



Guidelines for social policy

In addition to shaping law, international labour standards can provide guidance for developing national and local policies, such as employment, work and family policies. They can also be used to improve various administrative structures such as labour administration, labour inspection, social security administration, employment services, and so on. Standards can also serve as a source of good industrial relations applied by labour dispute resolution bodies, and as models for collective agreements.

Other areas of influence

While the ILO's constituents are the main users of international labour standards, other actors have found them to be useful tools as well. Indeed, new actors use international labour standards and thus participate in their diffusion at the international level.

- **Corporate social responsibility (CSR)**

The ILO defines CSR as a way in which enterprises give consideration to the impact of their operations on society and affirms their principles and values both in their own internal methods and in their interactions with other actors. In fact, increasing consumer interest in the ethical dimensions of products has led multinational enterprises to adopt voluntary codes of conduct to govern labour conditions in their production sites and those in their supply chains. The majority of the top 500 companies in the United States and the United Kingdom have adopted some sort of code of conduct, many of them referring to principles deriving from ILO standards. While these codes are no substitute for binding international instruments, they play an important role in spreading the principles contained in international labour standards.

The ILO can play an important role in CSR with two main reference points: the ILO Declaration on fundamental Principles and Right at Work and the *Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy*. In 2009, the ILO launched a Helpdesk that provides constituents and enterprises easy access to information, assistance, referral and advice regarding CSR and the implementation of labour standards⁹.

- **Other International Organizations**

The *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization* underlined that “other international and regional organizations with mandates in closely related fields can have an important contribution”, especially through the objectives of the *Decent Work Agenda*. Other international institutions regularly use international labour standards in their activities. Reports on the application of international labour standards are regularly submitted to the United Nations human rights bodies and other international entities. International financial institutions (IFI) and multi-lateral development bank (MDB), such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have integrated certain aspects of labour standards into some of their activities, including the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process or the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 2 which recognizes that the pursuit of economic growth through employment creation and income generation should be balanced with protection of basic rights of workers.¹⁰ With the adoption by the IFC in 2010 of the requirement that borrowing members comply with all core labour standards and other workplace practices, all MDB include core labour standards requirements in their standards bidding documents.

International labour standards also have a direct impact on such globalized industries as the maritime shipping sector. They are used not only to shape the national maritime legislation of member States, but are taken as the basis for port state ship inspections and have a direct impact on the regulations and codes of other international organizations, such as the International Maritime Organization.

- **Free-Trade agreements**

A growing number of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, as well as regional economic integration arrangements, contain social and labour provisions related to workers' rights. Indeed, trade agreements with labour provisions have increased significantly in the last two decades: 58 trade agreements included labour provisions in June 2013, up from 21 in 2005 and 4 in 1995¹¹. Labour provisions in free-trade agreements increasingly refer to ILO instruments, in particular the *1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, and, in the case of recent EU agreements, also to ILO Conventions. For example, the European Union special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (Generalized Schemes of Preferences/GSP+) provides additional benefits for countries implementing certain international standards in regard to human and labour rights. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed in 1992 and was complemented in 1994 by the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC), several free trade agreements signed by the United States with a number of countries including Chile, the Republic of Korea, Morocco, Jordan, Singapore and Central American countries, have reaffirmed the parties' commitment to the ILO and in particular the respect and promotion of the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. For instance, the 2009 US trade agreement with Peru requires the parties to comply with all principles of the ILO's 1998 Declaration without restrictions, in addition to enforcing their national labour laws.

Although labour provisions tend to be concentrated in North-South trade agreements, there is a modest but increasing trend to integrate labour provisions in trade agreements among developing and emerging countries.

- **Civil society**

Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations draw on international labour standards to call for changes in policy, law or practice. Civil society, and in particular, workers' organizations have been instrumental in activating the different dimensions of labour provisions in trade agreements. They also make an extensive use of the ILO supervisory bodies' comments in their advocacy strategies.

The role of employers' and workers' organizations

Representative employers' and workers' organizations play an essential role in the international labour standards system: they participate in choosing subjects for new ILO standards and in drafting the texts and their votes determine whether or not the International Labour Conference adopts a newly drafted standard. If a Convention is adopted, employers and workers can encourage a government to ratify it. As discussed in section 3, if the Convention is ratified, governments are required to periodically report to the ILO on how they are applying it in law and practice. Government reports must also be submitted to representative employers' and workers' organizations, which may add their comments, all of which are submitted to the ILO. Employers' and workers' organizations can also supply relevant information directly to the ILO. They can initiate representations for violations of ILO Conventions in accordance with procedures under article 24 of the ILO Constitution. Employer and worker delegates to the International Labour Conference can also file complaints against member States under article 26 of the Constitution.

If a member State has ratified the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), as 137 countries have done to date, it is obliged to hold national tripartite consultations on proposed new instruments to be discussed at the Conference, on submissions of instruments to the competent authorities, on reports concerning ratified Conventions, on measures related to unratified Conventions and recommendations, and on proposals regarding the denunciation of Conventions.



Freedom of association
Collective bargaining
Forced labour
Child labour
Equality of opportunity and treatment
Tripartite consultation
Labour administration
Labour inspection
Employment policy
Employment promotion
Vocational guidance and training
Employment security
Social policy
Wages
Working time
Occupational safety and health
Social security
Maternity protection
Domestic workers
Migrant workers
Seafarers
Fishers
Dockworkers
Indigenous and tribal peoples
Other specific categories of workers

SUBJECTS COVERED BY INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS


Ensuring freedom of association and collective bargaining can go a long way toward promoting labour market efficiency and better economic performance. And there are obvious economic and social reasons for banning slavery and all forms of forced labour.” – World Bank, 2004¹²

International labour standards respond to a growing number of needs and challenges faced by workers and employers in the global economy. This section presents the subjects covered by international labour standards and introduces a selection of relevant Conventions and Recommendations. It also explains what problems exist in a particular field today and how international labour standards are helping to provide solutions. Finally, some examples are highlighted where the application of international labour standards or of the principles they embody has made a positive contribution in a particular situation.

Note:

This section summarizes a selection of relevant ILO Conventions and Recommendations. The summaries are intended for information purposes and do not replace consultation of the authoritative text. Numerous other Conventions and Recommendations have not been summarized, even though many are relevant and in force. The complete list of ILO standards by subject and status may be consulted at the ILO website www.ilo.org/normes. The case examples were selected for illustrative purposes and are not intended to single out a specific country or situation.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION



The principle of freedom of association is at the core of the ILO's values: it is enshrined in the ILO Constitution (1919), the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia (1944), and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998). It is also a right proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The right to organize and form employers' and workers' organizations is the prerequisite for sound collective bargaining and social dialogue. Nevertheless, there continue to be challenges in applying these principles: in some countries certain categories of workers (for example public servants, seafarers, workers in export processing zones) are denied the right of association, workers' and employers' organizations are illegally suspended or interfered with, and in some extreme cases trade unionists are arrested or killed. ILO standards, in conjunction with the work of the Committee on Freedom of Association and other supervisory mechanisms (see section 3), pave the way for resolving these difficulties and ensuring that this fundamental human right is respected the world over.

Relevant ILO instruments

Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)

This fundamental Convention sets forth the right for workers and employers to establish and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization. Workers' and employers' organizations shall organize freely and not be liable to be dissolved or suspended by administrative authority, and they shall have the right to establish and join federations and confederations, which may in turn affiliate with international organizations of workers and employers.

Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)

This fundamental Convention provides that workers shall enjoy adequate protection against acts of anti-union discrimination, including requirements that a worker not join a union or relinquish trade union membership for employment, or dismissal of a worker because of union membership or participation in union activities. Workers' and employers' organizations

shall enjoy adequate protection against any acts of interference by each other, in particular the establishment of workers' organizations under the domination of employers or employers' organizations, or the support of workers' organizations by financial or other means, with the object of placing such organizations under the control of employers or employers' organizations. The Convention also enshrines the right to collective bargaining. (see also under collective bargaining).

Workers' Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135)

Workers' representatives in an undertaking shall enjoy effective protection against any act prejudicial to them, including dismissal, based on their status or activities as a workers' representative or on union membership or participation in union activities, in so far as they act in conformity with existing laws or collective agreements or other jointly agreed arrangements. Facilities in the undertaking shall be afforded to workers' representatives as may be appropriate in order to enable them to carry out their functions promptly and efficiently.

Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)

All categories of rural workers, whether they are wage earners or self-employed, shall have the right to establish and, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, to join organizations, of their own choosing without previous authorization. The principles of freedom of association shall be fully respected; rural workers' organizations shall be independent and voluntary in character and shall remain free from all interference, coercion or repression. National policy shall facilitate the establishment and growth, on a voluntary basis, of strong and independent organizations of rural workers as an effective means of ensuring the participation of these workers in economic and social development.

Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No.151)

Public employees as defined by the Convention shall enjoy adequate protection against acts of anti-union discrimination in respect of their employment, and their organizations shall enjoy complete independence from public authorities as well as adequate protection against any acts of interference by a public authority in their establishment, functioning or administration.

Freedom of association under fire

Although freedom of association is recognized as a fundamental right at work, unions and their members are still exposed to severe violations of their rights. In its recent flagship publication on “violations of trade unionists rights” (2013), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) estimated that union members have faced violence in 24 out of 87 countries (for which information is available). In Guatemala, 53 trade unionists were murdered during the past six years and 18 trade unionists have been killed in Colombia since January 2012. In 2013, governments of at least 35 countries have arrested or imprisoned workers as a tactic to resist demands for democratic rights, decent wages, safer working conditions and secure jobs. Laws and practices in at least 87 countries exclude certain type of workers from the right to strike. The ITUC also launched in 2014 a “Global Rights Index” ranking 139 countries against 97 internationally recognized indicators to assess where workers’ rights are best protected, in law and in practice. According to this ranking, in 32 countries, there is no guarantee of rights at all and workers are exposed to autocratic regimes and systematic unfair labour practices. Freedom of association is by no means just an issue for workers. Employers’ organizations have also lodged complaints over the years with the ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association regarding, for instance, illegal interference with the activities of their organizations.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Freedom of association ensures that workers and employers can associate to efficiently negotiate work relations. Combined with strong freedom of association, sound collective bargaining practices ensure that employers and workers have an equal voice in negotiations and that the outcome will be fair and equitable. Collective bargaining allows both sides to negotiate a fair employment relationship and prevents costly labour disputes. Indeed, some research has indicated that countries with highly coordinated collective bargaining tend to have less inequality in wages, lower and less persistent unemployment, and fewer and shorter strikes than countries where collective bargaining is less established.¹³

Established collective bargaining practices were an element that allowed the Republic of Korea to weather the Asian financial crisis of the 1990s and enabled South Africa to make a relatively peaceful transition into the postapartheid era.¹⁴ ILO standards promote collective bargaining and help to ensure that good labour relations benefit everyone.

Relevant ILO instruments

Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)

This fundamental Convention provides that measures appropriate to national conditions shall be taken, where necessary, to encourage and promote the full development and utilization of machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers or employers' organizations and workers' organizations, with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements. (see also under freedom of association).

Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151)

The Convention promotes collective bargaining for public employees, as well as other methods allowing public employees' representatives to participate in the determination of their conditions of employment. It also provides that disputes shall be settled through negotiation between the parties or through independent and impartial machinery, such as mediation, conciliation and arbitration.



Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)

Defines collective bargaining and calls for its promotion in all branches of economic activity, including public service.


Social dialogue in practice

Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) is an international company operating in Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Jamaica. Throughout much of its history, TCL was plagued by poor labour-management relations. Between 1984 and 1995 the company averaged two work stoppages a year and had no fewer than 47 unresolved grievances and disputes. Plant availability and efficiency were below 70%. After 1995 TCL's management adopted a new strategy which put a premium on sound relations with workers and included the establishment of a tripartite committee and negotiation strategies. As a result of this new approach, negotiations were completed rapidly and without any work stoppages, plant availability and efficiency increased, as did overall cement productivity and employee job satisfaction, while absenteeism went down. In 2002, management and workers together were able to fend off a foreign takeover bid for TCL, helped by the enhanced competitiveness and sound labour relations they had created. Good labour relations thus paid off for both workers and employers.¹⁵

Mediation mechanisms under the auspices of the ILO

The ILO International Labour Standards Department has promoted tripartite dispute settlement mechanisms at the request of governments against which complaints have been presented to the Committee on Freedom of Association by trade union organizations. These mechanisms, which offer mediation and which are based on the acceptance and attendance of the parties involved, include the possibility of requesting the presence of the national authorities with competence for supervising standards and interpretation. These mechanisms also enable complaints of violation of trade union rights to be examined at national level, where appropriate, before being brought to the attention of the Committee on Freedom of Association. These mechanisms have allowed solutions to be found to problems raised in formal complaints presented to the Committee on Freedom of Association concerning freedom of association and collective bargaining, for example, with regard to Colombia and Panama, leading to complaints being withdrawn.

FORCED LABOUR



Although forced labour is universally condemned, ILO estimates show that 20.9 million people around the world are still subjected to it. Of the total number of victims of forced labour, 18.7 million (90 per cent) are exploited in the private economy, by individuals or enterprises, and the remaining 2.2 million (10 per cent) are in state-imposed forms of forced labour. Among those exploited by private individuals or enterprises, 4.5 million (22 per cent) are victims of forced sexual exploitation and 14.2 million (68 per cent) of forced labour exploitation. Forced labour in the private economy generates US\$ 150 billion in illegal profits per year: two thirds of the estimated total (or US\$ 99 billion) comes from commercial sexual exploitation, while another US\$ 51 billion results from forced economic exploitation, including domestic work, agriculture and other economic activities.¹⁶

Vestiges of slavery are still found in some parts of Africa, while forced labour in the form of coercive and deceptive recruitment is present in many countries of Latin America, and elsewhere. In numerous countries, domestic workers are trapped in situations of forced labour, and in many cases they are restrained from leaving the employers' home through threats or violence. Bonded labour persists in South Asia where millions of men, women, and children are tied to their work through a vicious cycle of debt. In Europe and North America, an increasing number of women and children are victims of trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation. Trafficking in persons has been the subject of growing international attention in recent years. Finally, forced labour is still imposed by the State for the purposes of economic development or as a punishment, including for expressing political views.

For many governments around the world, the elimination of forced labour remains an important challenge for the 21st century. Not only is forced labour a serious violation of a fundamental human right, it is a leading cause of poverty and a hindrance to economic development. ILO standards on forced labour and the comments of the supervisory bodies, in combination with experience from technical assistance and cooperation, have provided important guidance to member States to develop a comprehensive response to forced labour.

Relevant ILO instruments

Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)

This fundamental Convention prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labour, which is defined as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” Exceptions are provided for work required under compulsory military service, normal civic obligations, as a consequence of a conviction in a court of law (provided that the work or service in question is carried out under the supervision and control of a public authority and that the person carrying it out is not hired to or placed at the disposal of private individuals, companies or associations), in cases of emergency, and for minor communal services. The Convention also requires that the exaction of forced labour be punishable as a penal offence, and that ratifying states ensure that the relevant penalties imposed by law are adequate and strictly enforced.

Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

This fundamental Convention complements Convention No. 29 and prohibits forced labour, including compulsory prison labour, as a means of political coercion or education or as a punishment for holding or expressing political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social or economic system; as a method of mobilizing and using labour for purposes of economic development; as a means of labour discipline; as a punishment for having participated in strikes; and as a means of racial, social, national or religious discrimination.

While these two instruments are among the most ratified, the persistence of practices of forced labour on a large scale reveals the existence of gaps in their implementation. This led the Governing Body to request the International Labour Conference to hold a discussion at its 103rd session to examine the adoption of an instrument to supplement Convention No. 29. The result was the adoption of the following instruments: *the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930*; *the Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)*.

In June 2014, the ILO therefore adopted a new legally binding Protocol on Forced Labour, supported by a Recommendation (No. 203), aiming to advance prevention, protection and compensation measures, as well as to intensify efforts to eliminate contemporary forms of slavery.

Forced labour in practice

The supervisory bodies have emphasized on numerous occasions the importance of adopting an overall national strategy to combat forced labour with a view to ensuring that comprehensive and concerted action is taken by the various responsible public agencies, with particular reference to labour inspection, law enforcement and the investigation services. A clear national policy against forced labour provides a fundamental point of departure for action to prevent and suppress forced labour and protect its victims, with particular emphasis on identifying priority sectors and occupations, raising public awareness, developing institutional capacity and coordination, mobilizing support and strengthening access to justice. The Committee of Experts has encouraged the elaboration and implementation of policies and action plans to combat forced labour in many countries, including with the technical support provided by the Office:

- In Brazil, actions plan on "slave labour", were adopted in 2003 and 2008, which provided the basis for strong inter-ministerial coordination through the National Commission to Eradicate Slave Labour (CONATRAE);
- In Peru, the implementation of the second National Plan to Combat Forced Labour, adopted in 2013, is coordinated by an inter-ministerial National Commission to Combat Forced Labour, in which employers' and workers' organizations participate;
- In Nepal, a revised National Plan of Action against Bonded Labour, adopted in 2009, includes measures such as law enforcement, awareness raising and advocacy, education, and income and employment generation.

In addition to action plans to combat forced labour, the vast majority of member States have adopted action plans specifically addressing trafficking in persons following the ratification of the UN Trafficking Protocol.

CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is a violation of fundamental human rights and has been shown to hinder children's development, potentially leading to lifelong physical or psychological damage. Evidence points to a strong link between household poverty and child labour, and child labour perpetuates poverty across generations by keeping the children of the poor out of school and limiting their prospects for upward social mobility. This lowering of human capital has been linked to slow economic growth and social development. An ILO study has shown that eliminating child labour in transition and developing economies could generate economic benefits nearly seven times greater than the costs, mostly associated with investment in better schooling and social services.¹⁷ The fundamental ILO standards on child labour constitute the two legal pillars for the global fight against child labor.

Relevant ILO instruments

Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)

This fundamental Convention sets the general minimum age for admission to employment or work at 15 years (13 for light work) and the minimum age for hazardous work at 18 (16 under certain strict conditions). It provides for the possibility of initially setting the general minimum age at 14 (12 for light work) where the economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed.

Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

This fundamental Convention defines as a "child" a person under 18 years of age. It requires ratifying states to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including: all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; child prostitution and pornography; using children for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs; and work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. The Convention requires ratifying states to provide the necessary and appropriate direct assistance for the removal of children from the worst forms of child labour and for their rehabilitation and social integration. It also requires states to ensure access to free basic education and, wherever possible and appropriate, vocational training for children removed from the worst forms of child labour.

To date, 165 countries have ratified at least one of the above two Conventions.



Child labour in numbers

The ILO estimates that 168 million children worldwide are in child labour, accounting for almost 11 per cent of the child population as a whole. Approximately 85 million children between 5 and 17 are engaged in hazardous work: 38 million children between the ages of 5 and 14, and 47 million between the ages of 14 and 17. Child labour is most prevalent in the agricultural sector, accounting for 59 per cent of all those in child labour, representing over 98 million children. While much remains to be done, progress has been achieved: the number of child labourers fell by almost one-third between 2000 and 2012, a reduction of approximately 78 million children.

By region, there remain:

77.7 million child labourers

(between the ages of 5 and 17) in Asia and the Pacific

59 million child labourers in Sub-Saharan Africa

12.5 million child labourers in Latin America and the Caribbean;

9.2 million in the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁸



The fight against child labour is by no means limited to the poorest countries. While the incidence of child labour is highest in the poorer countries (23 per cent of children in low-income countries are child labourers, compared to 9 per cent in lower middle-income countries and 6 per cent in upper middle-income countries), middle-income countries account for the largest number of child labourers. A recent ILO study revealed that lower middle-income and upper middle-income represent a total of 93.6 million child labourers, compared with 74.4 million in low-income countries.

Child labour standards in practice: fighting child labour in Myanmar and Brazil

Convention No. 182 constitutes a commitment to eliminating the worst forms of child labour, including the use of children in armed conflict. Since 2007, Myanmar has collaborated with the ILO to address the under-age recruitment of children. This included the Committee for the Prevention of Military Recruitment of Under-aged Children, a complaints system for victims seeking redress and the ILO Action Plan on under-age military recruitment, aimed at the identification, release and reintegration of underage soldiers. Demonstrating further commitment to fighting the scourge of child labour, Myanmar recently ratified Convention No. 182. This Convention has now almost achieved universal ratification, reflecting the overwhelming global consensus that certain forms of child labour demand urgent and immediate action for their elimination.

Since ratifying Convention No. 182 in 2000 and Convention No. 138 in 2001, Brazil has made tremendous strides towards the elimination of child labour. Economic activity of children between the ages of 7 and 15 years fell by more than half between 1992 and 2009 (from 18 per cent of children engaged in economic activity to less than 7 per cent), while school attendance rose from 85 per cent to 97 per cent.¹⁹ This progress was achieved through a systematic and integrated approach which encompassed policy reforms, a successful cash transfer programme conditional on school attendance and the strengthening of an equipped and trained labour inspectorate, including through the establishment of special mobile inspection groups to target child labour.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND TREATMENT

No society is free from discrimination. Indeed, discrimination in employment and occupation is a universal and permanently evolving phenomenon. Millions of women and men around the world are denied access to jobs and training, receive low wages, or are restricted to certain occupations simply on the basis of their sex, skin colour, ethnicity or beliefs, without regard to their capabilities and skills. In a number of developed countries, for example, women workers still earn up to 25% less than male colleagues performing equal work.²⁰ Freedom from discrimination is a fundamental human right and is essential for workers to choose their employment freely, to develop their potential to the full and to reap economic rewards on the basis of merit. Bringing equality to the workplace has significant economic benefits, too. Employers who practice equality have access to a larger and more diverse workforce. Workers who enjoy equality have greater access to training, often receive higher wages, and improve the overall quality of the workforce. The profits of a globalized economy are more fairly distributed in a society with equality, leading to greater social stability and broader public support for further economic development.²¹ ILO standards on equality provide tools to eliminate discrimination in all aspects of the workplace and in society as a whole. They also provide the basis upon which gender mainstreaming strategies can be applied in the field of labour.

Relevant ILO instruments

Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)

This fundamental Convention requires ratifying countries to ensure the application of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value. The term “remuneration” is broadly defined to include the ordinary, basic or minimum wage or salary and any additional emoluments payable directly or indirectly, whether in cash or in kind, by the employer to the worker and arising out of the worker’s employment.



In its 2012 General Survey on the Fundamental Conventions concerning rights at work in light of the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the Committee of Experts reiterated the principles already set out in its 2007 General Observation on the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) with respect to the concept of “work of equal value”, and stated the following:

“While equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value is a principle that is widely accepted, the scope of the concept and its application in practice have been more difficult to grasp and apply in some countries. [...] The Committee has noted that difficulties in applying the Convention in law and practice result in particular from a lack of understanding of the concept of “work of equal value”... The concept of “work of equal value” lies at the heart of the fundamental right of equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value, and the promotion of equality. Noting that many countries still retain legal provisions that are narrower than the principle laid down in the Convention, as they do not give expression to the concept of “work of equal value”, and that such provisions hinder progress in eradicating gender-based pay discrimination, the Committee again urges the governments of those countries to take the necessary steps to amend their legislation. Such legislation should not only provide for equal remuneration for equal, the same or similar work, but also address situations where men and women perform different work that is nevertheless of “equal value”.

In order to determine whether two jobs are of equal value, it is necessary to adopt some method to measure and compare their relative value taking into account factors such as skill, effort, responsibilities and working conditions. The Convention does not prescribe, however, a specific method to carry out this objective job evaluation.

Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

This fundamental Convention defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of, namely, race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation. The Convention also provides for the possibility of extending the list of prohibited grounds after consultation with representative employers' and workers' organisations, and relevant bodies. National legislations have included, in recent years, a broad range of additional prohibited grounds of discrimination, i.e. real or perceived HIV status, age, disability, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others. The Convention covers discrimination in relation to access to education and vocational training, access to employment and to particular occupations, as well as terms and conditions of employment. It requires ratifying states to declare and pursue a national policy designed to promote, by methods appropriate to national conditions and practice, equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating any discrimination in these fields. This policy and the measures adopted therein should be continually assessed and reviewed in order to ensure that they remain appropriate and effective in a regularly changing context.

In its General Survey of 2012, the Committee of Experts underlined that the Convention requires the national equality policy to be effective. It should therefore be clearly stated, which implies that programmes should be or have been set up, all discriminatory laws and administrative practices are repealed or modified, stereotyped behaviours and prejudicial attitudes are addressed and a climate of tolerance promoted, and monitoring put in place. Measures to address discrimination, in law and in practice, should be concrete and specific. They should make an effective contribution to the elimination of direct and indirect discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment for all categories of workers, in all aspects of employment and occupation and in respect of all the grounds covered by the Convention. Treating certain groups differently may be required to eliminate discrimination and to achieve substantive equality for all groups covered by the Convention.

**Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention,
1981 (No. 156)**

With the aim of creating effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers, the Convention requires ratifying states to make it a goal of national policy to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities. The Convention also requires governments to take account of the needs of workers with family responsibilities in community planning and to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as childcare and family services and facilities.

In addition to these standards, numerous other ILO standards include provisions on equality in relation to the specific topic they cover.

TRIPARTITE CONSULTATION

The ILO is based on the principle of tripartism – dialogue and cooperation between governments, employers, and workers – in the formulation of standards and policies dealing with labour matters. International labour standards are created and supervised through a tripartite structure that makes the ILO unique in the United Nations system. The tripartite approach to adopting standards ensures that they have broad support from all ILO constituents.

Tripartism with regard to ILO standards is also important at the national level. Through regular tripartite consultations, governments can ensure that ILO standards are formulated, applied and supervised with the participation of employers and workers. ILO standards on tripartite consultation set forth the framework for effective national tripartite consultations. Such consultations can ensure greater cooperation among the social partners and stronger awareness and participation in matters relating to international labour standards, and can lead to better governance and a greater culture of social dialogue on wider social and economic issues.

Because of the importance of tripartism, the ILO has made the ratification and implementation of the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No.144) a priority. Furthermore, the *2008 Declaration on Social Justice For a Fair Globalization* has stressed the key role of this instrument (together with the other three Governance (priority) Conventions – Nos 81, 122 and 129) from the viewpoint of governance.



Relevant ILO instruments

Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)

This governance Convention sets forth the meaning of “representative organizations” of employers and workers and requires ratifying states to operate procedures that ensure effective consultations between representatives of the government, of employers and of workers on matters regarding items on the agenda of the International Labour Conference, submissions to competent national authorities of newly adopted ILO standards, reexamination of unratified Conventions and Recommendations, reports on ratified Conventions, and proposals for denunciations of ratified Conventions. Employers and workers shall be represented on an equal footing on any bodies through which consultations are undertaken, and consultations shall take place at least once every year.

ILO standards in practice: social dialogue in Tunisia

In February 2013, shortly after the adoption of its new Constitution and just over a year after the signing of the social contract between the Government of Tunisia, the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (UTICA) and the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT), Tunisia became the 136th ILO member State to ratify Convention No. 144. Four years after the events of the ‘Arab Spring’, such ratification is expected to become the beginning of a promising era for the development of tripartism and social dialogue as a key element of democracy.

LABOUR ADMINISTRATION

International labour standards are usually applied through national law and policy. It is therefore vital that each country maintain a viable and active labour administration system responsible for all aspects of national labour policy formulation and implementation. Besides promoting labour administration systems in a variety of forms, ILO standards at the same time promote the collection of labour statistics, which are invaluable in identifying needs and formulating labour policy, at both the national and international level. While labour administrations exist in most countries around the world, many of them face financial and material difficulties. Adequate financing of labour administration systems is therefore necessary in order to maintain and strengthen this important tool for development.



Relevant ILO instruments

Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150)

Ratifying countries are required to ensure, in a manner appropriate to national conditions, the organization and effective operation in their territory of a system of labour administration, the functions and responsibilities of which are properly coordinated. The labour administration system shall be responsible for the formulation, implementation and supervision of national labour standards; employment and human resources development; studies, research and statistics on labour; and shall provide support for labour relations. Participation by workers and employers and their respective organizations in relation to national labour policy shall be ensured as well. Labour administration staff shall have the status, the material means and the financial resources necessary for the effective performance of their duties.

Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No. 160)

Ratifying countries are required to regularly collect, compile and publish basic labour statistics, which shall be progressively expanded in accordance with their resources, on the economically active population, employment, unemployment, and where possible visible underemployment; structure and distribution of the economically active population, average earnings and hours of work (hours actually worked or hours paid for) and, where appropriate, time rates of wages and normal hours of work; wage structure and distribution; labour cost; consumer price indices; household expenditure or, where appropriate, family expenditure and, where possible, household income or, where appropriate, family income; occupational injuries and, as far as possible, occupational diseases; and industrial disputes.

LABOUR INSPECTION

Proper application of labour legislation depends on an effective labour inspectorate. Labour inspectors examine how national labour standards are applied in the workplace and advise employers and workers on how to improve the application of national law in such matters as working time, wages, occupational safety and health, and child labour. In addition, labour inspectors bring to the notice of national authorities loopholes and defects in national law. They play an important role in ensuring that labour law is applied equally to all employers and workers. Because the international community recognizes the importance of labour inspection, the ILO has made the promotion of the ratification of two labour inspection Conventions (Nos. 81 and 129) a priority. To date, 145 countries (nearly 80% of ILO member States) have ratified the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), and 53 have ratified Convention No. 129.

Nevertheless, challenges remain in countries where labour inspection systems are underfunded and understaffed, and consequently unable to do their job. Some estimates indicate that in some developing countries less than 1% of the national budget is allocated to labour administration, of which labour inspection systems receive only a small fraction. Other studies show that the costs resulting from occupational accidents and illnesses, absenteeism, abuse of workers and labour conflict can be much higher. Labour inspection can help prevent these problems and thereby enhance productivity and economic development.²²



Relevant ILO instruments

Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)

This governance Convention requires ratifying states to maintain a system of labour inspection for workplaces in industry and commerce; states can make exceptions with regard to mining and transport. It sets out a series of principles respecting the determination of the fields of legislation covered by labour inspection, the functions and organizations of the system of inspection, recruitment criteria, the status and terms and conditions of service of labour inspectors, and their powers and obligations. The labour inspectorate has to publish and communicate to the ILO an annual report indicating the general functioning of its services on a number of issues.

Protocol of 1995 to the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)

Each state that ratifies this protocol shall extend the application of the provisions of the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) to workplaces considered as non-commercial, which means neither industrial nor commercial in the sense of the Convention. It also allows ratifying states to make special arrangements for the inspection of enumerated public services.

Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)

This governance Convention, similar in content to Convention No. 81, requires ratifying states to establish and maintain a system of labour inspection in agriculture. Labour inspection coverage may also be extended to tenants who do not engage outside help, sharecroppers and similar categories of agricultural workers; persons participating in a collective economic enterprise, such as members of a cooperative; or members of the family of the operator of the agricultural undertaking, as defined by national laws or regulations.

Promoting regional coordination and cooperation in the area of labour inspection

In 2009, member States of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) – Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Bolivarian republic of Venezuela – signed the Labour Inspection Regional Plan (PRIT)²³ which makes provision for the development of coordinated inspection activities in border areas with a view to attaining higher efficiency in detecting and correcting cases of non-compliance with labour standards. Focus is placed on protecting fundamental labour and social rights, preventing and eliminating child labour and combating undeclared work. Targeted cooperation actions included a joint campaign against child labour in 2009 and the inspection of freight trucks at several border crossing points between Argentina and Brazil in 2013. The PRIT also makes provisions for the establishment of Geographical Areas for the Strategic Coordination of Labour Inspection Services (AGCEF), aimed at strengthening information channels between inspection authorities, and for a training programme for MERCOSUR inspectors.

Formulating principles of deontology for labour inspection services

In France, the Ministry of Labour published in February 2010 a collective work on "Principles of Deontology for Labour Inspection", with the ILO technical support. Based on national legislation and international law, i.e. ILO Conventions, this reference document spells out ten key professional rules for discharging the functions of labour inspection and provides guidance to labour inspection agents at all levels of administrative hierarchy, especially to new recruits. In his preface, the Minister of Labour stated that "deontology reinforces the coherent action of the labour inspection agents at all hierarchical levels [...] while protecting the citizens from the risks of arbitrariness. Indeed the principle of independence of labour inspection is not only a right for the agents concerned but also a guarantee for the citizens to have an organized public service which is not subject to any undue external influence".²⁴

EMPLOYMENT POLICY

For most people, the key to escaping poverty means having a job. Recognizing that developing labour standards without addressing employment would be senseless, the ILO dedicates a large part of its programme to creating greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income. To reach this goal, it promotes international standards on employment policy which, together with technical cooperation programmes, are aimed at achieving full, productive and freely chosen employment. No single policy can be prescribed to attain this objective. Every country, whether developing, developed, or in transition, needs to devise its own policies to bring about full employment. ILO standards on employment policy provide a framework for designing and implementing such policies, thereby ensuring maximum access to jobs needed to enjoy decent work.

Relevant ILO instruments

Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122)

This governance Convention requires ratifying states to declare and pursue an active policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment. Such a policy shall aim to ensure that there is work for all who are available for and are seeking work; that such work is as productive as possible; and that there is freedom of choice of employment and the fullest possible opportunity for each worker to qualify for, and to use his or her skills and endowments in, a job for which he or she is well suited, irrespective of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin. This policy shall take due account of the stage and level of economic development and the mutual relationships between employment objectives and other economic and social objectives, and shall be pursued by methods that are appropriate to national conditions and practices. The Convention also requires member States to take measures to apply an employment policy in consultation with workers' and employers' representatives.

In 2010, the ILO's Committee of Experts undertook a General Survey of law and practice regarding employment instruments in ILO member States.

As regards employment policies, from the perspective of Convention No. 122, the Committee of Experts was satisfied to note that almost all countries were committed to the goal of increasing productive employment. While such commitment may take various legal forms, a majority of countries had translated it into policy. In addition, some ILO member States have included employment creation within their poverty reduction strategies. Furthermore, among the aspects of employment policy, in developing countries, emphasis was given to the increase in the employment intensity of growth, the promotion of employment in rural areas through agricultural development and non-farm rural employment development, and the need to devote special attention to the informal economy.

Global Employment Agenda and Follow-up to the 2008 Declaration

In 2003 the ILO's Governing Body adopted the Global Employment Agenda, which set forth ten core elements for developing a global strategy to boost employment. These included such economic strategies as promoting trade and investment for productive employment and market access for developing countries, sustainable development for sustainable livelihoods, and policy integration on macroeconomic policy. Other core elements comprised strategies supported by international labour standards, such as the promotion of cooperatives and small and medium enterprises, training and education, social protection and occupational safety and health, as well as equality and collective bargaining.²⁵ The follow up action to the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization includes a scheme of recurrent discussions at the International Labour Conference. As a response to the Declaration's requirement for an integrated approach in helping member States meet the ILO objectives, it was decided that a recurrent report be prepared by the Office for discussions at the International Labour Conference. In November 2008, the Governing Body decided upon the first of the strategic objectives to be discussed, as a recurrent item. The first recurrent discussion was devoted to employment and took place in 2010.

EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION

Convention No. 122 sets out the goal of full, productive and freely chosen employment; other ILO instruments put forward strategies for attaining this aim. Employment services (public and private), the employment of disabled persons, small and medium enterprises and cooperatives all play a part in creating employment. ILO standards in these fields provide guidance on using these means effectively in order to create jobs.



Relevant ILO instruments

Employment Service Convention, 1948 (No. 88)

Requires ratifying states to establish and operate an employment service accessible to everyone, free of charge both to workers and employers.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159)

Sets forth the principles of national policy for the vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities and provides for the setting up and evaluation of vocational guidance, vocational training, placement and unemployment services for persons with disabilities.

Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181)

Requires ratifying states to ensure that private employment agencies respect principles on non-discrimination. Provides for cooperation between private and public employment services, general principles to protect job-seekers against unethical or inappropriate practices, and protection of workers under subcontracting arrangements and workers recruited from abroad. Also applies to temporary work agencies.

Older Workers Recommendation, 1980 (No. 162)

Recommends that older workers should, without discrimination on the grounds of their age, enjoy equality of opportunity and treatment in employment.

Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998 (No. 189)

Suggests that member States should adopt measures which are appropriate to national conditions and consistent with national practice in order to promote small and medium-sized enterprises, in regard to their importance in promoting employment and sustainable economic growth.

Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193)

Aims to promote cooperatives, in particular in relation to their role in job creation, mobilizing resources, and generating investment.

Securing employment for disabled workers

The Conference Committee on the Application of Standards has had the opportunity to review, over the past decade, two cases of progress in the field of vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. The approach taken by Ireland and Iceland towards the promotion of employment opportunities was praised by the Conference Committee, respectively in 2006 and 2013. The reported efforts made by Ireland in order to streamline services to people with disabilities had taken two forms, namely an institutional re-configuration involving the transfer of responsibility for policy and a bipartite partnership involving the Irish Business and Employer's Confederation (IBEC) and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). The Workway programme was the first project in Europe to adopt a partnership approach to high unemployment among people with disabilities. It was established in 2001 under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. Workway aimed to raise awareness and promote employment of people with disabilities in the private sector. In order to do so, the programme operated through tripartite local networks, established in the four regions of the country. The programme was co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Commission. Tripartism and social dialogue were also at the cornerstone of the efforts undertaken by Iceland by means of enacting specific pieces of legislation on disability and by operating a vocational rehabilitation fund (VIRK). The origins of such legislation went back to the collective agreements of 2008 which included provisions on the development of new rehabilitation arrangements designed to provide remedies for workers who fell ill for long periods or suffered accidents resulting in a reduction of their working capacity. The VIRK was also established to give effect to an agreement reached by the social partners in 2008 on the imposition of a special premium on employers to be paid to a special fund operated for that purpose.

Youth Employment: challenges and perspectives

In 2012, the general discussion of the International Labour Conference reviewed the magnitude and characteristics of the youth employment crisis. It considered in particular the high levels of employment and underemployment, the decline in the quality of jobs available for young people, the detachment from the labour market and slow and difficult transitions to decent work. Following that discussion, a resolution was adopted calling for immediate, targeted and renewed action to tackle the youth employment crisis. The ILC resolution recognized that international labour standards play an important role in protecting the rights of young workers. It also included an appendix listing international labour standards relevant to work and young persons. While data from the *Global Employment Trends 2014* report confirms that the labour market outlook for young people worsened in nearly every region of the world²⁶, in its 2014 report, the Committee of Experts noted the efforts made through active labour market measures for promoting youth employment in countries such as Costa Rica, the Republic of Korea, Morocco and Uruguay.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND TRAINING

Education and training are the key to making people employable, thereby allowing them to gain access to decent work and to escape poverty. To compete in today's global economy, workers and employers need to be especially well trained in information and communication technology, new forms of business organization, and the workings of the international market. Societies aiming to attain full employment and sustained economic growth therefore need to invest in education and human resources development. By providing basic education, core work skills, and lifelong learning opportunities for their entire working population, countries can help ensure that workers can maintain and improve their employability, resulting in a more skilled and productive workforce. Nevertheless, gaps in education and access to information technology persist between countries and within countries. ILO standards encourage countries to develop sound human resources practices and training policies which are beneficial to all the social partners. Because of the continued importance of this topic, in 2004 the International Labour Conference adopted an updated Recommendation concerning Human Resources Development: Education, Training and Lifelong Learning (No. 195).

Relevant ILO instruments

Paid Educational Leave Convention, 1974 (No. 140)

Requires ratifying states to formulate and apply a policy designed to promote, by methods appropriate to national conditions and practice and by stages as necessary, the granting of paid educational leave for the purpose of training at any level, general, social and civic education, and trade union education.

Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142)


Requires ratifying states to develop policies and programmes of vocational guidance and vocational training, closely linked with employment, in particular through public employment services. For this purpose, states are further required to develop complementary systems of general, technical and vocational education, educational and vocational guidance and vocational training, and to extend them gradually to young persons and adults, including appropriate programmes for the disabled.

Education and training in practice

By investing in human resources, enterprises can improve productivity and compete more successfully in world markets. One study has found that in Denmark, for instance, enterprises which combined production innovations with targeted training were more likely to report growth in output, jobs and labour productivity than companies that did not pursue such strategies. Studies on Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States reached similar conclusions. Training benefits not only the individual worker, but by increasing her or his productivity and skill level, the employer reaps the rewards as well.²⁷

The 2010 General Survey on employment instruments includes a reference to the critical relation between Convention No. 142, as complemented by Recommendation No. 195, the attainment of full employment and decent work, and the realization of the right to education for all. The report also acknowledged the important role to be played by Convention No. 142 in combating discrimination. The Committee of Experts observed that there was a growing problem of unemployment among educated workers, particularly young university graduates, who are unable to find secure employment commensurate with their skill level. This was therefore an issue for the advanced market economies as well as developing countries. The Committee of Experts encouraged governments to develop job creation and career guidance policies targeted at this new category of the educated unemployed.

EMPLOYMENT SECURITY



The termination of an employment relationship is likely to be a traumatic experience for a worker and the loss of income has a direct impact on her or his family's well-being. As more countries seek employment flexibility and globalization destabilizes traditional employment patterns, more workers are likely to face involuntary termination of employment at some point in their professional lifetime. At the same time, the flexibility to reduce staff and to dismiss unsatisfactory workers is a necessary measure for employers to keep enterprises productive. ILO standards on termination of employment seek to find a balance between maintaining the employer's right to dismiss workers for valid reasons and ensuring that such dismissals are fair and are used as a last resort, and that they do not have a disproportionate negative impact on the worker.

Relevant ILO instruments

Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)

The instrument sets forth the principle that the employment of a worker should not be terminated unless there is a valid reason for such termination connected with the worker's capacity or conduct or based on the operational requirements of the undertaking, establishment or service. Reasons for dismissal which shall not be considered valid include those based on union membership or participation in union activities, filing of a complaint against an employer, race, colour, sex, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, temporary absence due to illness, or absence from work during maternity leave. If an individual worker is dismissed, he or she shall have the right to defend him or herself against any allegations. In cases of collective dismissals, governments should aim at encouraging employers to consult workers' representatives and to develop alternatives to mass lay-offs (such a hiring freezes or working time reductions). The Convention also covers matters related to severance pay, period of notice, appeal procedures against dismissal, and unemployment insurance, and advance warning to be given to authorities in cases of mass dismissals.²⁸

SOCIAL POLICY

The ILO Constitution, in the Declaration of Philadelphia, states that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity” and that the fulfilment of this objective “must constitute the central aim of national and international policy”. Social policy formulated through dialogue between the social partners has the best chance of achieving the aims agreed upon by the international community. Relevant ILO standards provide a framework for creating social policies which ensure that economic development benefits all those who participate in it.

Relevant ILO instruments

Social Policy (Basic Aims and Standards) Convention, 1962 (No. 117)

The Convention sets forth the general principle that all policies shall be primarily directed to the well-being and development of the population and to the promotion of its desire for social progress. Furthermore, the improvement of standards of living shall be regarded as the principal objective in the planning of economic development. It also provides additional requirements concerning migrant workers, agricultural producers, independent producers and wage earners, minimum wage-fixing and payment of wages, non-discrimination, and education and vocational training.



WAGES

Most people work in order to earn money. Yet in many parts of the world, access to adequate and regular wages is not guaranteed. In numerous countries, non-payment of wages has led to huge wage arrears, and wages are sometimes paid in bonds, manufactured goods, or even alcohol. Large wage arrears have been linked to debt bondage and slavery. In other countries, workers face loss of wages when their employer goes bankrupt. Before the 2008 economic crisis, the link between wages and labour productivity was already broken in many countries and this contributed to the creation of global economic imbalances. The Global Jobs Pact, adopted by the ILO Conference in 2009, made several references to minimum wages as one of the means of responding to such crisis, and Convention No. 131 is the only ILO instrument to which it refers specifically in that regard. When wages rise in line with productivity increases, they are both sustainable and create a stimulus for further economic growth by increasing households' purchasing power. ILO standards on wages address these problems by providing for regular payment of wages, the fixing of minimum wage levels, and the settlement of unpaid wages in case of employer insolvency.



Relevant ILO instruments

Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94)

Aims at ensuring respect for minimum labour standards in the execution of public contracts.

Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95)

Wages shall be paid in legal tender at regular intervals; in cases where partial payment of wages is in kind, the value of such allowances should be fair and reasonable. Workers shall be free to dispose of their wages as they choose. In cases of employer insolvency, wages shall enjoy a priority in the distribution of liquidated assets.

Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)

Requires ratifying states to establish a minimum wage fixing machinery capable of determining and periodically reviewing and adjusting minimum wage rates having the force of law.

Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Convention, 1992 (No. 173)

Provides for the protection of wage claims in insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings, by means of a privilege or through a guarantee institution.

Also relevant:

Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)

Lays down the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.

Minimum wages: Wages and productivity

As part of its Decent Work Agenda, the ILO encourages member States to adopt a minimum wage to reduce working poverty and provide social protection for vulnerable employees. The ILO's *Global Wage Report 2012/2013* found that in current economic conditions, minimum wages remain a topic of debate on the policy agenda and in the public domain in both developed and developing countries. One of the key findings is the downward trend in the labour share and the growing inequality in personal income distribution. The report shows that there is a long-term trend towards a falling share of labour compensation and a rising share of profits in many countries. This indicates that there have been discrepancies between wages and labour productivity growth in a large number of countries. Average wages have declined in developed economies in 2008 and 2011. As for internal imbalances, austerity policies and a prolonged period of economic downturn are unlikely to reverse trends in the personal distribution of wages and incomes. These developments not only have consequences on economic stability and growth, but they also challenge the notion of social justice and undermine social cohesion. Unequal distribution and concentration of incomes among top earners and the owners of capital have been the cause of public dissatisfaction across the world, increasing the risk of social unrest and social instability. In developed economies, they have reduced the acceptance of austerity and fiscal consolidation measures. In developing countries, they have sparked a multitude of strikes and protests, especially when food and energy price increases have simultaneously eroded the purchasing power of wage earners at the bottom. To overcome this situation, it is suggested that policy actions towards "rebalancing" should be taken at both national and global levels. In 2014, the ILO's Committee of Experts published a General Survey on minimum wage systems. In the conclusion of the survey, the Committee considered that the objectives set out in Convention No. 131 remained just as relevant today as they were when they were adopted in 1970 despite the passage of true changes and developments affecting the world of work. Objectives, principles and methods set out in Convention No. 131 have not only resisted the economic, political and social transformations that the world has experienced since their adoption in 1970 but they also match perfectly public policies by which States aim at reconciling the objectives of economic development and social justice.

WORKING TIME

The regulation of working time is one of the oldest concerns of labour legislation. Already in the early 19th century it was recognized that working excessive hours posed a danger to workers' health and to their families. The very first ILO Convention, adopted in 1919 (see below), limited hours of work and provided for adequate rest periods for workers. Today, ILO standards on working time provide the framework for regulated hours of work, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual holidays. These instruments ensure high productivity while safeguarding workers' physical and mental health. Standards on part-time work have become increasingly important instruments for addressing such issues as job creation and promoting equality between men and women.

Relevant ILO instruments

Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1)

Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30)

These two Conventions set the general standard at 48 regular hours of work per week, with a maximum of 8 hours per day.

Forty-Hour Week Convention, 1935 (No. 47)

Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation, 1962 (No. 116)

Set out the principle of the 40-hour workweek.

Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921 (No. 14)

Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957 (No. 106)

Set the general standard that workers shall enjoy a rest period of at least 24 consecutive hours every 7 days.

Holidays with Pay Convention (Revised), 1970 (No. 132)

Every person to whom the Convention applies shall enjoy at least three working weeks of annual paid holiday for one year of service.



Night Work Convention, 1990 (No. 171)

Requires ratifying states to take measures required by the nature of night work for the protection of night workers. Night work is defined as work performed during a period of not less than seven consecutive hours, including the interval from midnight to 5 a.m. Also requires alternatives to night work to be offered to women for specified periods during and after pregnancy.

Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175)

Requires ratifying states to ensure that part-time workers receive the same protection, basic wage and social security, as well as employment conditions equivalent to those accorded to comparable full-time workers.

Working time in practice

According to ILO statistics as of 2012, the average weekly hours actually worked per employed person ranges from 11.4 hours (Guatemala) to 50 hours (Qatar).²⁹ In addition, an analysis based on the available data on 44 countries and territories indicates that average weekly working hours largely ranges between 35 and 45 hours. Focusing on developing countries, however, a significant number of them have longer weekly working hours, often exceeding 48 hours. Turning to high-income countries, their weekly working hours are relatively short, with the exception of some Asian countries.³⁰ Working time is an area where society has considerably evolved over time. As regards working time, new forms of working time, such as teleworking, flexitime, and on-call work, are bound to pose new challenges for policy makers. The International Labour Conference has maintained its efforts to respond to societal changes by adopting updated international labour standards.

The ILO Constitution sets forth the principle that workers should be protected from sickness, disease and injury arising from their employment. Yet for millions of workers the reality is very different. The ILO estimates that 2.02 million people die each year from work-related accidents or diseases. A further 317 million people suffer from work-related diseases, and there are an estimated 337 million fatal and non-fatal work-related accidents per year. The suffering caused by such accidents and illnesses to workers and their families is incalculable. In economic terms, the ILO has estimated that 4% of the world's annual GDP is lost as a consequence of occupational diseases and accidents. Employers face costly early retirements, loss of skilled staff, absenteeism, and high insurance premiums due to work-related accidents and diseases. Yet many of these tragedies are preventable through the implementation of sound prevention, reporting and inspection practices. ILO standards on occupational safety and health provide essential tools for governments, employers, and workers to establish such practices and to provide for maximum safety at work. In 2003, the ILO adopted an action plan for occupational safety and health which included the introduction of a preventive safety and health culture, the promotion and development of relevant instruments, and technical assistance.

Relevant ILO instruments

The ILO has adopted more than 40 standards specifically dealing with occupational safety and health, as well as over 40 Codes of Practice. Nearly half of ILO instruments deal directly or indirectly with occupational safety and health issues.

Fundamental principles of occupational safety and health

Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187)

As a promotional framework Convention, this Convention is designed to provide for coherent and systematic treatment of occupational safety and health issues and promote recognition of existing Conventions on occupational safety and health. The Convention is aimed at establishing and implementing coherent national policies on occupational safety and health through dialogue between government, workers' and employers' organizations and to promote a national preventive safety and health culture. Despite its recent adoption, the Convention has been in force since early 2008 and has already been ratified by more than 30 member States.

**Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
and its Protocol of 2002**

The Convention provides for the adoption of a coherent national occupational safety and health policy, as well as action to be taken by governments and within enterprises to promote occupational safety and health and to improve working conditions. This policy shall be developed by taking into consideration national conditions and practice. The Protocol calls for the establishment and the periodic review of requirements and procedures for the recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases, and for the publication of related annual statistics.

Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)

This Convention provides for the establishment of enterprise-level occupational health services which are entrusted with essentially preventive functions and which are responsible for advising the employer, the workers and their representatives in the enterprise on maintaining a safe and healthy working environment.

Health and safety in particular branches of economic activity

Hygiene (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1964 (No. 120)

This instrument has the objective of preserving the health and welfare of workers employed in trading establishments, and establishments, institutions and administrative services in which workers are mainly engaged in office work and other related services through elementary hygiene measures responding to the requirements of welfare at the workplace.

Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Convention, 1979 (No. 152)
See under dockworkers.

Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167)

The Convention provides for detailed technical preventive and protective measures having due regard for the specific requirements of this sector. These measures relate to safety of workplaces, machines and equipment used, work at heights and work executed in compressed air.

Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No. 176)

This instrument regulates the various aspects of safety and health characteristic for work in mines, including inspection, special working devices, and special protective equipment of workers. It also prescribes requirements relating to mine rescue.

Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)

The Convention has the objective of preventing accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with, or occurring in the course of agricultural and forestry work. To this end, the Convention includes measures relating to machinery safety and ergonomics, handling and transport of materials, sound management of chemicals, animal handling, protection against biological risks, and welfare and accommodation facilities.

Protection against specific risks

Radiation Protection Convention, 1960 (No. 115)

The objective of the Convention is to set out basic requirements with a view to protect workers against the risks associated with exposure to ionising radiations. Protective measures to be taken include the limitation of workers' exposure to ionising radiations to the lowest practicable level following the technical knowledge available at the time, avoiding any unnecessary exposure, as well as the monitoring of the workplace and of the workers' health. The Convention further refers to requirements with regard to emergency situations that may arise.

Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 (No. 139)

This instrument aims at the establishment of a mechanism for the creation of a policy to prevent the risks of occupational cancer caused by exposure, generally over a prolonged period, to chemical and physical agents of various types present in the workplace. For this purpose, states are obliged to determine periodically carcinogenic substances and agents to which occupational exposure shall be prohibited or regulated, to make every effort to replace these substances and agents by non or less carcinogenic ones, to prescribe protective and supervisory measures as well as to prescribe the necessary medical examinations of workers exposed.

Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148)

The Convention provides that, as far as possible, the working environment shall be kept free from any hazards due to air pollution, noise or vibration. To achieve this, technical measures shall be applied to enterprises or processes, and where this is not possible, supplementary measures regarding the organization of work shall be taken instead.

Asbestos Convention, 1986 (No. 162)

Aims at preventing the harmful effects of exposure to asbestos on the health of workers by indicating reasonable and practicable methods and techniques of reducing occupational exposure to asbestos to a minimum.

With a view to achieving this objective, the Convention enumerates various detailed measures, which are based essentially on the prevention and control of health hazards due to occupational exposure to asbestos, and the protection of workers against these hazards.

Chemicals Convention, 1990 (No. 170)

The Convention provides for the adoption and implementation of a coherent policy on safety in the use of chemicals at work, which includes the production, the handling, the storage, and the transport of chemicals as well as the disposal and treatment of waste chemicals, the release of chemicals resulting from work activities, and the maintenance, repair and cleaning of equipment and containers of chemicals. In addition, it allocates specific responsibilities to suppliers and exporting states.

Occupational safety and health in numbers³¹


According to ILO estimates, each year, 2.02 million workers die from work-related diseases while 321,000 workers are killed on the job, that is one worker every 15 seconds. Workers are victims of approximately 317 million non-fatal occupational accidents annually. Death and injuries take a particularly heavy toll in developing countries, where a large part of the population is engaged in hazardous activities, such as construction, fishing, mining and agriculture, where some 170,000 agricultural workers are killed every year.

Taking into account new and emerging occupational risks

In 2010, the ILO elaborated a new list of occupational diseases designed to assist countries in the prevention, recording, notification and compensation of diseases caused by work. This list replaces the one in the Annex to the Recommendation concerning the List of Occupational Diseases and the Recording and Notification of Occupational Accidents and Diseases (No. 194) and includes a range of internationally recognized occupational diseases, from illnesses caused by chemical, physical and biological agents to respiratory and skin diseases, musculoskeletal disorders and occupational cancer. Mental and behavioural disorders have for the first time been specifically included in the ILO list.

On the occasion of the 2010 World Day for Safety and Health, the Organization also drew attention to new and emerging occupational risks which may be caused by technical innovation or by social or organizational change, such as (i) new technologies and production processes (e.g. nanotechnology, biotechnology, chemical hazards); (ii) new working conditions (e.g. higher workloads, work intensification from downsizing, poor conditions associated with migration for work, jobs in the informal economy); and (iii) emerging forms of employment, (e.g. self-employment, outsourcing, temporary contracts).³²

SOCIAL SECURITY



A society that provides security for its citizens protects them not only from war and disease, but also from the insecurities related to making a living through work. Social security systems provide for basic income in cases of unemployment, illness and injury, old age and retirement, invalidity family responsibilities such as pregnancy and childcare, and loss of the family breadwinner. Such benefits are important not only for individual workers and their families but also for their communities as a whole. By providing health care, income security and social services, social security enhances productivity and contributes to the dignity and full realization of the individual. Social security systems also promote gender equality through the adoption of measures to ensure that women who have children enjoy equal opportunities in the labour market. For employers and enterprises, social security helps maintain a stable workforce adaptable to change. Finally, by providing a safety net in case of economic crisis, social security serves as a fundamental element of social cohesion, thereby helping to ensure social peace and a positive engagement with globalization and economic development. Despite these advantages, only 20% of the world's population have adequate social security coverage, while more than half lack any kind of social security coverage at all.

ILO standards on social security provide for different types of social security coverage under different economic systems and stages of development. Social security Conventions offer a wide range of options and flexibility clauses which allow the goal of universal coverage to be reached gradually. In a globalizing world, where people are increasingly exposed to global economic risks, there is growing consciousness of the fact that a broad-based national social protection policy can provide a strong buffer against many of the negative social effects of crises. For these reasons, in 2012, the International Labour Conference adopted an important new instrument, the Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202).

Relevant ILO instruments

Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)

Lays down the minimum standard for the level of social security benefits and the conditions under which they are granted. It covers the nine principal branches of social security, namely medical care, sickness, unemployment, old age, employment injury, family, maternity, invalidity and survivors' benefits. To ensure that it could be applied in all national circumstances, the Convention offers states the possibility of ratification by accepting at least three of its nine branches and of subsequently accepting obligations under other branches, thereby allowing them to progressively attain all the objectives set out in the Convention. The level of minimum benefits can be determined with reference to the level of wages in the country concerned. Temporary exceptions may also be envisaged for countries whose economy and medical facilities are insufficiently developed, thereby enabling them to restrict the scope of the Convention and the coverage of the benefits granted.

Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)

This instrument gives guidance on introducing or maintaining social security floors and on implementing social protection floors as part of strategies to extend higher levels of social security to as many people as possible, in accordance with the guidelines set out in ILO standards relating to social security.

Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962 (No. 118)

Maintenance of Social Security Rights Convention, 1982 (No. 157)

These instruments provide for certain social security rights and benefits for migrant workers, who face the problem of losing entitlements to social security benefits which they enjoyed in their country of origin.

Further social security instruments

A later generation of Conventions expands the scope of protection provided by Convention No. 102. While offering a higher level of protection in terms of scope and level of benefits to be guaranteed, these instruments authorize certain exceptions which ensure flexibility.

The benefits provided under Convention No. 102 and under later conventions are outlined below. This information does not include provisions on the duration and conditions of entitlement to benefits, derogations allowed under these instruments, or higher levels of benefits provided by relevant recommendations.³³

Medical care

- Convention No. 102: provides for preventive care, general practitioner care, including home visits, specialist care, essential pharmaceutical supplies as prescribed, prenatal, confinement and postnatal care by medical practitioners or qualified midwives, and hospitalization where necessary.
- Convention No. 130: provides the same benefits as Convention No. 102, plus dental care and medical rehabilitation.

Sickness benefit

- Convention No. 102: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 45% of the reference wage.
- Convention No. 130: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 60% of the reference wage. Also provides for funeral expenses in case of death of the beneficiary.

Unemployment benefit

- Convention No. 102: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 45% of the reference wage.
- Convention No. 168: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 50% of the reference wage. Beyond the initial period, possibility of applying special rules of calculation. Nevertheless, the total benefits to which the unemployed may be entitled must guarantee them healthy and reasonable living conditions in accordance with national standards.

Old-age benefit

- Convention No. 102: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 40% of the reference wage. The rates of relevant benefits must be revised following substantial changes in the general level of earnings and /or the cost of living.
- Convention No. 128: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 45% of the reference wage. Same conditions as Convention No. 102 relating to the revision of rates.

Employment injury benefit

- Convention No. 102: medical care, periodical payments corresponding to at least 50% of the reference wage in cases of incapacity for work or invalidity. Benefits for widow and dependent children in case of death of breadwinner with periodical payments corresponding to at least 40% of the reference wage. Possibility of converting periodical payments into lump sums under certain conditions. Except in the case of incapacity for work, obligation to revise the rates of periodical payments following substantial changes in the cost of living.

- Convention No. 121: same as Convention No. 102, plus certain types of care at the place of work. Periodical payments, corresponding to at least 60% of the reference wage in cases of incapacity for work or invalidity, benefits for widow, the disabled and dependent widower, and dependent children in case of death of breadwinner, with periodical payments corresponding to at least 50% of the reference wage. Obligation to prescribe minimum amount for these payments, possibility of converting payments into a lump sum under certain conditions, and supplementary benefits for disabled persons requiring the constant help of a third person.

Family benefit

- Convention No. 102: provides either periodical payments or the provision of food, clothing, housing, holidays or domestic help, or a combination of these.
- No new Convention exists on this topic.

Maternity benefit

- Convention No. 102: medical care including at least prenatal, confinement and postnatal care either by medical practitioners or by qualified midwives and hospitalization where necessary; periodical payments, corresponding to at least 45% of the reference wage.
- Convention No. 183: medical benefits including prenatal, childbirth and postnatal care, as well as hospitalization care when necessary; cash benefits to ensure that the woman can maintain herself and her child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable standard of living. At least two-thirds of previous earnings or comparable amount.

Invalidity benefit

- Convention No. 102: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 40% of the reference wage; the rates of relevant benefits must be revised following substantial changes in the general level of earnings and/or in the cost of living.

- Convention No. 128: periodical payments corresponding to at least 50% of the reference wage; the rates of relevant benefits must be revised following substantial changes in the general level of earnings and/or in the cost of living. Obligation to provide rehabilitation services and to take measures to further the placement of disabled persons in suitable employment.

Survivors' benefit

- Convention No. 102: periodical payments, corresponding to at least 40% of the reference wage; the rates of relevant benefits must be revised following substantial changes in the general level of earnings and/or in the cost of living.
- Convention No. 128: periodical payments corresponding to at least 45% of the reference wage; the rates of relevant benefits must be revised following substantial changes in the general level of earnings and/or in the cost of living.

MATERNITY PROTECTION

Raising a family is a cherished goal for many working people. Yet pregnancy and maternity are an especially vulnerable time for working women and their families. Expectant and nursing mothers require special protection to prevent harm to their or their infants' health, and they need adequate time to give birth, to recover, and to nurse their children. At the same time, they also require protection to ensure that they will not lose their job simply because of pregnancy or maternity leave. Such protection not only ensures a woman's equal access to employment, it also ensures the continuation of often vital income which is necessary for the wellbeing of her entire family. Safeguarding the health of expectant and nursing mothers and protecting them from job discrimination is a precondition for achieving genuine equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women at work and enabling workers to raise families in conditions of security.

Relevant ILO instruments

Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

This Convention is the most up-to-date international labour standard on maternity protection, although the earlier relevant instruments – the Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3), and the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103) – are still in force in certain countries.

Convention No. 183 provides for 14 weeks of maternity benefit to women to whom the instrument applies. Women who are absent from work on maternity leave shall be entitled to a cash benefit which ensures that they can maintain themselves and their child in proper conditions of health and with a suitable standard of living and which shall be no less than two-thirds of her previous earnings or a comparable amount. The Convention also requires ratifying states to take measures to ensure that a pregnant woman or nursing mother is not obliged to perform work which has been determined to be harmful to her health or that of her child, and provides for protection from discrimination based on maternity. The standard also prohibits employers to terminate the employment of a woman during pregnancy or absence on maternity leave, or during a period following her return to work, except on grounds unrelated to pregnancy, childbirth and its consequences, or nursing. Women returning to work must be returned to the same position or an equivalent position paid at the same rate. Also provides a woman the right to one or more daily breaks or a daily reduction of hours of work to breastfeed her child.

Maternity leave: countries complying with ILO standards

Globally, 53 per cent of the 185 countries studied (98 countries) provide a maternity leave period of at least 14 weeks, the standard established by Convention No. 183. Among those, 42 countries meet or exceed the 18 weeks of leave suggested in Recommendation No. 191. Sixty countries provide 12 to 13 weeks of leave – less than the duration specified by Convention No. 183, but consistent with the level set by Conventions Nos. 3 and 103 of at least 12 weeks of leave. Only 15 per cent (27 countries) provide less than 12 weeks of maternity leave. Out of the 185 countries with information available, all but three provide cash benefits to women during maternity leave. The three exceptions are Oman, Papua New Guinea, and the United States, all of which provide some form of maternity leave but have no general legal provision of cash benefits. Globally, 45 per cent (74 countries) of the 167 studied provide cash benefits of at least two-thirds of earnings for at least 14 weeks. In fact, 37 per cent (61 countries) go beyond this standard by providing 100 per cent of previous earnings for at least 14 weeks. In over half (93 countries), however, maternity leave is unpaid, paid at less than two-thirds of previous earnings, or paid for a period of less than 14 weeks.

DOMESTIC WORKERS

Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. They work for private households, often without clear terms of employment, unregistered in any book, and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. Currently there are at least 53 million domestic workers worldwide, not including child domestic workers, and this number is increasing steadily in developed and developing countries. 83% of domestic workers are women.

Deplorable working conditions, labour exploitation, and abuses of human rights are major problems facing domestic workers. Only 10 per cent of all domestic workers (or 5.3 million) are covered by general labour legislation to the same extent as other workers. By contrast, more than one-quarter – 29.9 per cent, or some 15.7 million domestic workers – are completely excluded from the scope of national labour legislation.

Relevant ILO instruments

Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)

This Convention, with the accompanying Recommendation No. 201, set out that domestic workers around the world who care for families and households, must have the same basic labour rights as those available to other workers: reasonable hours of work, weekly rest of at least 24 consecutive hours, a limit on in-kind payment, clear information on terms and conditions of employment, as well as respect for fundamental principles and rights at work including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.



Domestic workers in figures

Domestic work is a significant source of employment: it accounts for 1.7 per cent of total employment worldwide, and for 3.6 per cent of wage employment. While domestic work is less prevalent in advanced countries (0.9 per cent of total wage employment) and in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries (0.4 per cent), it accounts for a far higher share of wage employment in many developing and emerging countries: in Latin America and the Caribbean, 11.9 per cent of wage employment is in domestic services, followed by the Middle East (8.0 per cent), Africa (4.9 per cent) and Asia (3.5 per cent). Domestic work is predominantly carried out by women, who account for 83 per cent of all domestic workers worldwide. The gender composition fluctuates between regions, and the female share ranges from approximately 64 per cent in the Middle East and 67 per cent in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries to 92 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To date, 14 countries have ratified ILO Convention No.189 (2011): Argentina, Uruguay, Philippines, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Paraguay, South Africa, Guyana, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, Costa Rica and Columbia.

MIGRANT WORKERS

The growing pace of economic globalization has created more migrant workers than ever before. Unemployment and increasing poverty have prompted many workers in developing countries to seek work elsewhere, while developed countries have increased their demand for labour, especially unskilled labour. As a result, millions of workers and their families travel to countries other than their own to find work. At present there are approximately 232 million migrants around the world, representing 3,1 per cent of the global population. Women make up almost half of migrants. It is estimated that one in eight migrants are between the age of 15 and 24. Migrant workers contribute to the economies of their host countries, and the remittances they send home help to boost the economies of their countries of origin. Yet at the same time migrant workers often enjoy little social protection, face inequalities in the labour market and are vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Skilled migrant workers are less vulnerable to exploitation, but their departure has deprived some developing countries of valuable labour needed for their own economies. ILO standards on migration provide tools for both countries of origin and destination to manage migration flows and ensure adequate protection for this vulnerable category of workers.³⁴

Relevant ILO instruments

Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)

Requires ratifying states to facilitate international migration for employment by establishing and maintaining a free assistance and information service for migrant workers and taking measures against misleading propaganda relating to emigration and immigration. Includes provisions on appropriate medical services for migrant workers and the transfer of earnings and savings. States have to apply treatment no less favorable than that which applies to their own nationals in respect to a number of matters, including conditions of employment, freedom of association and social security.

Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No.143)

Provides for measures to combat clandestine and illegal migration while at the same time setting forth the general obligation to respect the basic human rights of all migrant workers. It also extends the scope of equality between legally resident migrant workers and national workers beyond the provisions of the 1949 Convention to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, social security, trade union and cultural rights, and individual and collective freedoms for persons who as migrant workers or as members of their families are lawfully within a ratifying state's territory. Calls upon ratifying states to facilitate the reunification of families of migrant workers legally residing in their territory.

Youth and migration

Young migrants make up more than 10 per cent of the overall 232 million international migrants, and, being the most mobile social group, young people constitute the bulk of annual migration movements. International migration represents an opportunity for young men and women to provide a better life for themselves and their families, pursue educational aspirations, improve their professional skills and prospects, or satisfy a desire for personal development through the adventures and challenges that come with living abroad. The migration of young people, however, takes place in the context of high youth unemployment and the lack of decent work creation at home. The unemployment rate among youth in almost all countries is at least twice that of the general unemployment rate, and nearly 73 million young people are estimated to be unemployed, according to the 2013 ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth report. Unfortunately, as a result, many young migrants frequently get trapped in exploitative and abusive jobs, including forced labour. And too often, they – like other migrants – become scapegoats for the shortcomings of economic and social systems.³⁵

Good practices on labour migration

In 2010, the ILO established a "Good practices database on labour migration" which is updated on a regular basis. The database assists constituents in member States in their efforts to developing and improving migration policies and programmes to maximise benefits of labour migration and minimise its negative consequences.³⁶

SEAFARERS

An estimated 90% of world trade is carried on ships and requires seafarers to operate ships.³⁷ Seafarers are in this sense essential to international trade and the international economic system. In fact shipping and seafarers are one of the earliest of the “globalized” industries. This means that very often seafarers drawn from many countries work together on board ships that are registered or “flagged” in yet another country and owned by shipowners based in still another country. Under international law, the country in which a ship is flagged – that is, the country whose flag the ship flies is the country with international responsibility for establishing and implementing and enforcing working and living standards on board ships, irrespective of the nationality of the seafarers or the shipowner.

In ships flying the flags of countries that do not exercise effective jurisdiction and control over them, as required by international law, seafarers often have to work under unacceptable conditions, to the detriment of their well-being, health and safety and the safety of the ships on which they work. Since seafarers’ working lives are spent outside the home country and their employers are also often not based in their country, effective international standards are necessary for this sector. Of course these standards must also be implemented at a national level, particularly by governments that have a ship registry and authorize ships to fly their countries’ flags. This is already well recognized in connection with ensuring the safety and security of ships and protecting the marine environment. It is also important to understand that there are many flag States and shipowners that take pride in providing the seafarers on their ships with decent conditions of work. These countries and shipowners face unfair competition in that they pay the price of being undercut by shipowners which operate substandard ships.

Since the ship is both their home and workplace for prolonged periods of time, working and living conditions for seafarers are therefore of primary importance. Moreover, seafarers are exposed to many unique occupational risks. They also face exposure to extreme weather conditions as well as the possibility of being abandoned in a foreign country if the shipowner runs into financial or other difficulties. In addition contemporary concerns for enhanced national security and border controls have made it difficult for seafarers to exercise right to go ashore for brief periods for their health and well-being or to travel to join or leave a ship on its voyage.



Relevant ILO instruments

To protect the world's seafarers and their contribution to international trade, the ILO has adopted over the years some 70 instruments (41 Conventions and related Recommendations) through special maritime sessions of the International Labour Conference. The ILO's international standards for this sector establish the minimum conditions for "decent work" and address almost all aspects of work including minimum requirements for work on a ship (such as minimum age, medical fitness and training) provisions on the conditions of employment such as hours of work and rest, wages, leave, repatriation, accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering, occupational safety and health protection, medical care, welfare and social security protection. In addition, they address issues such as pensions and an internationally recognized document for seafarers (a seafarers' identity document) to assist in border control matters.

Consolidation of ILO Maritime Standards

In February 2006, at the 10th Maritime Session, the 94th ILC adopted the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006). This Convention revised and consolidated 37 existing Conventions and the related Recommendations. Those Conventions are no longer open for ratification, although ILO Members that have ratified any of these earlier Conventions but not ratified the MLC, 2006 will remain bound by the Convention in question, including responsibility for submission of national implementation reports required under article 22 of the ILO Constitution. Rather than being open for ratification, those Conventions are now "consolidated" into one instrument, the MLC, 2006, which uses a new format with some updating, where necessary, to reflect modern conditions and language. In this connection, it provides, in one instrument, the comprehensive rights of the world's 1.5 million seafarers to decent conditions of work on almost every aspect of their working and living conditions including, among others, minimum age, employment agreements, hours of work or rest, payment of wages, paid annual leave, repatriation at the end of contract, on board medical care, the use of licensed private recruitment and placement services, accommodation, food and catering, health and safety protection and accident prevention and seafarers' complaint handling.³⁸

The MLC, 2006 applies to a wide range of ships operating on international and national or domestic voyages. It also contains important new compliance and enforcement components based on flag State inspection and for port State control. Exceptions to its scope of coverage include those navigating exclusively in inland waters or waters within, closely adjacent to sheltered waters or areas where port regulations apply; those engaged in fishing or similar pursuits; and ships of traditional build such as dhows and junks and warships or naval auxiliaries.

To enter into force, the MLC, 2006 needed to register at least 30 ratifications by countries representing at least 33 per cent of the world's gross shipping tonnage. On 20 August 2012, both prerequisites were satisfied, and the Convention entered into force 12 months later, on 20 August 2013. The Convention has now been ratified by over 60 countries representing over 80 per cent of the world's gross tonnage and is continuing to meet widespread ratification.

In view of its far-reaching impact on the enforcement mechanisms at national level, as well as to continue to promote its widespread ratification, the ILO delivers a wide range of capacity-building activities such as national tripartite seminars and has developed a wide range of resources such as the MLC, 2006 devoted website, which stores updated information on activities under the Convention, the MLC, 2006 database, which contains country-specific implementation information of countries that have ratified the Convention, as well as implementing Guidelines and model national legislation. In addition, the Maritime Labour Academy based at the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin delivers a number of workshops on the MLC, 2006, including short-term residential training courses for inspectors and trainers of maritime labour inspectors, workshops in cooperation with the international organizations representing seafarers and shipowners and workshops on legislative drafting.

In March 2013, the ILO Governing Body adopted the Standing Orders for the Special Tripartite Committee, which is mandated under Article XIII of the MLC, 2006 to keep the working of the Convention under continuous review. Under the Convention, the Committee has the power to consider and propose to the International Labour Conference amendments to the Code of the Convention and will also play an important consultative role under Article VII for countries that do not have national shipowners' or seafarers' organizations to consult when implementing the MLC, 2006. The Committee was established in June 2013 and held its first meet-

ing in April 2014, during which it adopted amendments to the Code to address the issue of financial security for crew members/seafarers and their dependents, with regard to compensation in cases of personal injury, death and abandonment, which was then transmitted to the International Labour Conference for approval in June 2014. In accordance with the provisions of Article XV of the MLC, 2006, the amendments will enter into force for ratifying Members that have not expressed disagreement six months after the end of a prescribed period (under the Convention the period is usually two years) unless more than 40 per cent of those Members, representing not less than 40 per cent of the gross tonnage of the ships of those Members, have formally expressed disagreement.

FISHERS

An estimated 58.3 million people are engaged in the primary sector of capture fisheries and aquaculture. This includes 37 per cent engaged full time, 23 per cent engaged part time, and the rest working as either occasional fishers or of unspecified status (FAO 2014). Fishing involves long hours and strenuous activity in an often challenging marine environment. Fishers may be using simple or complex dangerous machinery to catch, sort and store fish. Injury and fatality rates are much higher in the fishing sector than national averages for all workers in many countries. In the event of injury or illness at sea, fishers may be far from professional medical care and must rely on others on board for such care; medical evacuation services vary considerably among countries and regions. Fishing vessels may be at sea for long periods, operating in distant fishing grounds. Fishers often face difficulty in taking shore leave in foreign ports and problems obtaining visas allowing them to join or leave the vessel in foreign countries. Relationships between employers (fishing vessel owners) and workers are diverse. There are two main types of payment system in the sector: the flat wage and the share system. A flat wage is a fixed salary per pay period. Under a share system contract, fishers earn a percentage of the gross revenue or profit of the particular fishing trip. Sometimes fishers may be paid a low minimum wage, the rest of their pay being based on a share of the catch or on bonuses. In many countries, these arrangements place fishers in the category of “self-employed”. To respond to the specific needs of workers engaged in fishing, the ILO has developed standards specifically aimed at providing protection for the men and women who work in this sector. In view of the importance of the fishing industry and the developments that have taken place since the adoption of fishing standards in 1959 and 1966 respectively and bearing



in mind that fishing vessels were specifically excluded from the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, the International Labour Conference adopted during its 97th session the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) and Work in Fishing Recommendation, 2007 (No. 199), which are aimed to be comprehensive standards addressing living and working conditions of fishers.

Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188)

Taking into account the need to revise Conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference specifically concerning the fishing sector, namely the Minimum Age (Fishermen) Convention, 1959 (No. 112), the Medical Examination (Fishermen) Convention, 1959 (No. 113), the Fishermen's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1959 (No. 114), and the Accommodation of Crews (Fishermen) Convention, 1966 (No. 126), this Convention updates these instruments and aims to reach a greater number of the world's fishers, particularly those working on board smaller vessels. The objective of this Convention is to ensure that fishers have decent conditions of work on board fishing vessels with regard to minimum requirements for work on board; conditions of service; accommodation and food; occupational safety and health protection; medical care and social security. It applies to all commercial fishing, with the exception of subsistence and recreational fishing; to all vessels regardless of size; and to all fishers, including those who are paid on the basis of a share of the catch. Amongst the many improvements, the new Convention:

- raises the minimum age for work on board a fishing vessels to 16 years;
- it fixes the maximum period of validity of a medical certificate to 2 years;
- it requires the adoption of laws regarding minimum levels of crewing and defines minimum periods of daily and weekly rest for vessels remaining at sea for more than 3 days;
- it establishes fishers' entitlement to repatriation at the cost of the fishing vessel owner;
- and finally, it incorporates port state control provisions modelled after those applicable in the shipping industry.

Other earlier ILO instruments

Medical Examination (Fishermen) Convention, 1959 (No. 113)

Provides that no person shall be employed in any capacity on a vessel if he or she is not fit enough to be employed at sea. Requires ratifying states to provide prior medical examination and time-limited certification by an approved medical practitioner.

Fishermen's Articles of Agreement Convention, 1959 (No. 114)

Provides that articles of agreement (employment contracts) shall be signed both by the owner of the vessel or his authorized representative and by the fisher. The agreement shall clearly state the respective rights and obligations of each of the parties and shall, among other things, specify the voyage or voyages to be undertaken, the capacity in which the fisher is to be employed, the amount of his or her wages, and the termination of the agreement.

Fishermen's Competency Certificates Convention, 1966 (No. 125)

Requires ratifying states to establish standards of qualification for certificates of competency for the skipper, mate or engineer on board a fishing vessel, and to organize and supervise the examination of candidates to ensure that they have the necessary qualifications. Sets forth the minimum age and minimum professional experience necessary for each profession, and competences necessary for specific categories and grades of certificates for which candidates have to prove their qualification.

Accommodation of Crews (Fishermen) Convention, 1966 (No. 126)

Sets forth requirements on crew accommodation with respect to bulkheads, sleeping rooms, ventilation, heating, lighting, floor space, mess rooms, sanitary facilities, galleys and medical facilities.

DOCKWORKERS



For many countries, the dock industry is today an important link in the transport network that requires constant upgrading in order to respond to the demands of international trade. The growing transport volume, the increasing sophistication of infrastructure, the widespread use of containers, and the intensity of capital investment required for the development of dock activities have led to profound reforms in the sector. Once relying on mostly occasional and low-skilled labour, dock work now requires more highly skilled workers who are increasingly registered workers. At the same time, there are growing demands on dockworkers to be more productive and to work in shifts, while the overall dock workforce has been reduced. Developing countries are finding it difficult to finance the development of increasingly sophisticated ports. ILO standards help address these challenges by dealing with two peculiarities of dock work: the need for specific protection due to safety and health hazards to which dockworkers are exposed during their work, and the impact of technological progress and international trade on their employment and the organization of work in ports.

Relevant ILO instruments

Dock Work Convention, 1973 (No. 137)

This Convention deals with new methods of work in docks and their impact on employment and the organization of the profession. It has two main objectives: first, to afford protection to dockworkers in their professional life through measures relating to the conditions of their access to and performance of work; and second, to foresee and manage in the best possible manner, through appropriate measures, fluctuations in the work and the workforce required for it.

Occupational Safety and Health (Dock Work) Convention, 1979 (No. 152)

This Convention requires ratifying states to take measures with a view to providing and maintaining workplaces, equipment and methods of work that are safe and without risk of injury to health; providing and maintaining safe means of access to any workplace; providing information, training and supervision necessary to ensure protection of workers against risks of accident or injury to health at work; providing workers with personal protective equipment and clothing and any life-saving appliances reasonably required; providing and maintaining suitable and adequate first-aid and rescue facilities; and developing and establishing proper procedures for emergency situations which may arise.

INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLES

Indigenous and tribal peoples have their own cultures, ways of life, traditions and customary laws. Unfortunately, throughout history, lack of respect for tribal and indigenous cultures has led to numerous instances of social conflict and bloodshed. Today, the international community has accepted the principle that the cultures, ways of life, traditions and customary laws of indigenous and tribal peoples are valuable and need to be respected and protected, and that indigenous and tribal peoples should participate in decision-making processes in the country in which they live. The most recent ILO standards on this subject set out these principles and provide a framework for governments, organizations of indigenous and tribal peoples, and non-governmental organizations to ensure the development of the peoples concerned, with full respect for their needs and desires.

Relevant ILO instruments

The **Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)** and the older **Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107)** are to date the only international treaties dealing exclusively with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. Convention No. 169, which is considered an up-to-date instrument and which revised Convention No. 107, provides for consultation and participation of indigenous and tribal peoples with regard to policies and programmes that may affect them. It provides for enjoyment of fundamental rights and establishes general policies regarding indigenous and tribal peoples' customs and traditions, land rights, the use of natural resources found on traditional lands, employment, vocational training, handicrafts and rural industries, social security and health, education, and cross-border contacts and communication.



Indigenous and tribal peoples' rights in practice

Over the years, many countries have adopted or amended legislation putting Convention No. 169 into practice. A number of Latin American countries, including the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have recognized in their constitutions the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of their respective populations. Some countries have also taken steps to ensure self-governance, participation and consultation. For example, in 1987 Norway set up the Sameting, a Parliament for the Sami people with consultative and limited administrative authority. Denmark, for its part, has set up Greenland Home Rule authorities so that many local matters may be governed by and for the Inuit peoples of Greenland. More recently, on 30 August 2010, the Central African Republic became the first African country to ratify Convention No. 169. In 2013, the Committee of Experts commended the country's commitment, amidst concern at the extremely worrying situation prevailing for the Aka and Mbororo communities in the country.

In 2013, the ILO published a handbook to assist readers in achieving a better understanding of the relevance, the scope and the implications of Convention No. 169; to foster efforts by tripartite constituents and indigenous peoples' organizations for its implementation; and to aid enterprises to work with the Convention in pursuing their investment opportunities and projects³⁹.

Convention No. 169 and Peace Agreements

On two occasions, the ratification of Convention No. 169 has occurred as an integral element of peace accords, to put an end to an internal armed conflict that was rooted in the exclusion of indigenous communities. In Guatemala, the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace put an end to 36 years of civil war, in December 1996. The 1996 agreement brought into effect a number of previous accords negotiated over a six years period such as the Agreement on the Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which was signed, on 31 March 1995, by the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG). The peace agreements facilitated the ratification of Convention No.169 by Guatemala, on 5 June 1996. In Nepal, the formal end of the armed conflict initiated in February 1996 was reached, on 21 November 2006, with the signature of a Comprehensive Peace Accord between the Government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The peace process consisted of various agreements, some of which included provisions on the ratification of Convention No. 169; the Convention was ratified by Nepal on 14 September 2007.

OTHER SPECIFIC CATEGORIES OF WORKERS

International labour standards in most cases have universal value and apply to all workers and all enterprises. Some standards mentioned earlier cover specific industries, such as seafaring. Finally there are a number of standards dealing with work-related issues in very specific sectors of economic activity (plantations, hotels, restaurants) or concerning specific groups of workers (nursing personnel, homeworkers).



Relevant ILO instruments

Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110) and its Protocol of 1982

Plantations still constitute an important economic factor in many developing countries. These instruments cover the recruitment and engagement of migrant workers and afford protection to plantation workers in respect of employment contracts, wages, working time, medical care, maternity protection, employment accident compensation, freedom of association, labour inspection, and housing.

Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977 (No. 149)

Due to growing health services, many countries lack sufficiently qualified nursing personnel. Many nurses are migrant workers who face particular challenges. This Convention requires each ratifying state to adopt measures appropriate to national conditions to provide nursing personnel with education and training and with working conditions, including career prospects and remuneration, which are likely to attract persons to the profession and retain them in it. Nurses shall enjoy conditions at least equivalent to those of other workers in the country with regard to hours of work, weekly rest, paid annual holidays, educational leave, maternity leave, sick leave, and social security.

Working Conditions (Hotels and Restaurants) Convention, 1991 (No. 172)

Tourism contributes to 9% of the world's GDP and 8 % of total employment.⁴⁰ However, these workers, mainly women and young people, are often paid wages that are at least 20% lower than those in other sectors. With the objective of improving the working conditions of workers in hotels and restaurants and bringing them closer to those prevailing in other sectors, this Convention provides for reasonable hours of work, overtime provisions, rest periods, and annual leave. It also stipulates that the sale and purchase of employment in hotels and restaurants be prohibited.

Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177)


Homeworkers, the majority of whom are women, constitute a particularly vulnerable category of workers on account of their often informal status and lack of legal protection, their isolation and their weak bargaining position. The objective of the Convention is to promote equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners, in particular in relation to freedom of association, protection against discrimination, occupational safety and health, remuneration, social security, access to training, minimum age for admission to work, and maternity protection.

Women in Hotels, catering and tourism

Hotels, catering and tourism (HCT) is a large and fast-growing service sector, with an average female participation of 55.5 per cent at global level. They are employed in a wide variety of roles, including as cleaners and kitchen staff, front-line customer service workers and senior management. The recruitment, retention and promotion of talented women for technical and managerial leadership positions will be necessary to meet the future skills and productivity requirements of the sector. Moreover, women will comprise an even larger proportion of the sector's client base as more will travel for business and leisure. This too will have an impact on gender equality in the recruitment of employees. The ILO highlighted the challenges faced by women in the HCT workplace underlying the divergence between qualifications and workplace reality for women, who make up between 60 and 70 per cent of the labour force. Unskilled or semi-skilled women tend to work in the most vulnerable jobs, where they are more likely to experience poor working conditions, inequality of opportunity and treatment, violence, exploitation, stress and sexual harassment.

Working conditions in the health sector

In addition to promoting social health protection for all workers, the ILO supports better working conditions for health workers through sectoral labour standards and social dialogue. The shortage of trained health workers coincides with longer life expectancies, increasing use of specialized medical technology and the rise of new and drug resistant diseases. Meanwhile, hospitals and other health facilities are rarely considered as workplaces. As the demand for health services grows and the shortage of qualified health personnel becomes more severe, working conditions deteriorate and the quality of health care may be jeopardized. The critical shortage of workers in the poorest countries is further exacerbated by wealthier countries offering better working conditions to migrant health workers. The ILO collaborates with the WHO to address these challenges by recognizing health facilities as unique work environments and encouraging improvements of working conditions so that health workers are encouraged and supported to provide high quality care in their own communities.



Regular supervisory system
Representations
Complaints
Freedom of association
Applying Conventions when countries have not ratified them
Technical assistance and training
ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
ILO Declaration on Social Justice For a Fair Globalization

APPLYING AND PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS

“The many complexities attached to ILO standards-related activity permit me to draw the following conclusions [...]: that our standards-setting and supervisory system is indispensable to the work of the ILO and we cannot imagine the ILO without it; that it has a proven record of achievement in numerous settings [...]; that it has adapted, and will need to continue to adapt, to evolving circumstances, it is not set in stone for ever; that despite the generally inhospitable environment towards labour market regulation in recent decades, the ILO’s global membership has, in the context of the current controversy over the right to strike, strongly demonstrated its support for the ILO standards system and the political resolve to maintain its authority. – Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General, 2014⁴¹

International labour standards are backed by a supervisory system that is unique at the international level and that helps to ensure that countries implement the Conventions they ratify. The ILO regularly examines the application of standards in member States and points out areas where they could be better applied. If there are any problems in the application of standards, the ILO seeks to assist countries through social dialogue and technical assistance.

REGULAR SUPERVISORY SYSTEM

Once a country has ratified an ILO Convention, it is obliged to report regularly on measures it has taken to implement it. Every three years governments must submit reports detailing the steps they have taken in law and practice to apply any of the eight fundamental and four governance Conventions they may have ratified; for all other Conventions, reports must be submitted every five years, except for Conventions that have been “shelved” (no longer supervised on a regular basis). Reports on the application of Conventions may be requested at shorter intervals. Governments are required to submit copies of their reports to employers’ and workers’ organizations. These organizations may comment on the governments’ reports; they may also send comments on the application of Conventions directly to the ILO.

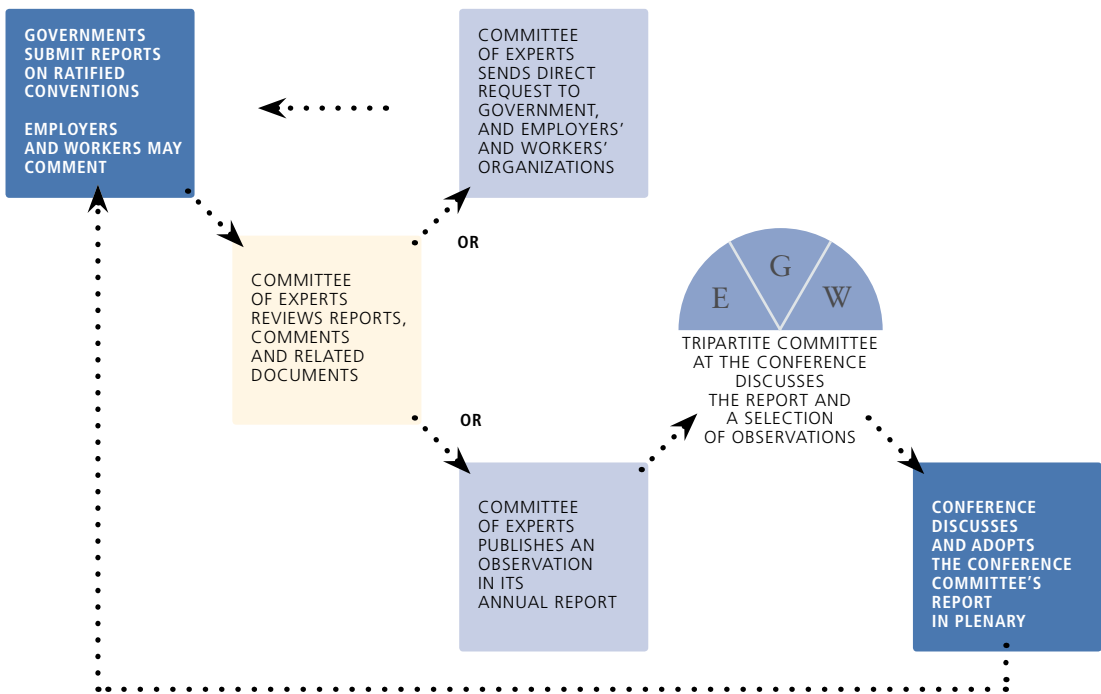
The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations

The Committee of Experts was set up in 1926 to examine the growing number of government reports on ratified Conventions. Today it is composed of 20 eminent jurists appointed by the Governing Body for three-year terms. The Experts come from different geographic regions, legal systems and cultures. The Committee’s role is to provide an impartial and technical evaluation of the state of application of international labour standards in ILO member States.

When examining the application of international labour standards, the Committee of Experts makes two kinds of comments: *observations* and *direct requests*. Observations contain comments on fundamental questions raised by the application of a particular Convention by a state. These observations are published in the Committee’s annual report. Direct requests relate to more technical questions or requests for further information. They are not published in the report but are communicated directly to the governments concerned.⁴²

The Committee’s annual report consists of three parts. Part I contains a General Report, which includes comments about member States’ respect for their Constitutional obligations; Part II contains the observations on the application of international labour standards, while Part III is a General Survey (see below).

The regular supervisory process



The Conference Committee on the Application of Standards

The annual report of the Committee of Experts, usually adopted in December, is submitted to the International Labour Conference the following June, where it is examined by the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards. A standing committee of the Conference, the Conference Committee is made up of government, employer, and worker delegates. It examines the report in a tripartite setting and selects from it a number of observations for discussion. The governments referred to in these comments are invited to respond before the Conference Committee and to provide information on the situation in question. In many cases the Conference Committee draws up conclusions recommending that governments take specific steps to remedy a problem or to invite ILO missions or technical assistance. The discussions and conclusions of the situations examined by the Conference Committee are published in its report. Situations of special concern are highlighted in special paragraphs of its General Report.

The impact of the regular supervisory system

Since 1964, the Committee of Experts has kept track of the number of *cases of progress* in which it noted changes in law and practice which improved the application of a ratified Convention. To date, nearly 3,000 cases of progress have been noted.

In recent years, in response to comments it has made, the Committee noted such changes as the following:

- Samoa adopted the Labour and Employment Relations Act of 2013 (LER Act of 2013). In section 51(2) of the LER Act of 2013, children under 18 years of age are prohibited from being employed on dangerous machinery or in any occupation or in any place under working conditions injurious or likely to be injurious to the physical or moral health of such child.
- Ukraine adopted a Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men which entered into force on 1 January 2006. The Law is aimed at ensuring equality of women and men in all spheres of society, including employment, through enforcement of equal rights, the elimination of gender discrimination, and positive action to address the existing inequalities between men and women. Under section 17, equal rights and opportunities shall be granted to women and men in the field of employment, job promotion, skills development and retraining.
- Lebanon adopted Decree No. 8987 of 2012 on the prohibition of the employment of minors under the age of 18 in works that may harm their health, safety or morals. According to this decree, minors under the age of 18 shall not be employed in prohibited types of work and activities which, by their nature, harm the health, safety or morals of children, limit their education and constitute one of the worst forms of child labour included in Annex No. 1 of the Decree. Moreover, minors under the age of 16 shall not be employed in such types of hazardous work which are listed in Annex No. 2 of the Decree, and which include work in agricultural activities; work in factories that manufacture tiles, rocks, and the like, work in building, demolition, excavation, construction, and heights climbing, and working in commercial and industrial enterprises.

- The United Republic of Tanzania has repealed the Industrial Court of Tanzania Act (No. 41 of 1967), which contained provisions prohibiting strikes contrary to the procedure under the Act, enforceable with penalties of imprisonment (involving an obligation to perform labour).

The impact of the regular supervisory system is not just limited to cases of progress. The Committee of Experts each year examines whether member States have fulfilled their obligation to submit adopted instruments to their legislative bodies for consideration. Even if a country decides not to ratify a Convention, it may choose to bring its legislation into conformity with it. Member States regularly review the Committee's comments on the application of a Convention in other countries and may amend their own legislation and practice so as to avoid similar problems in the application of a standard, or in order to emulate good practices. Where a Convention has been ratified, the Committee often makes direct requests to governments, pointing to apparent problems in the application of a standard and giving the countries concerned time to respond and tackle these issues before any comments are published in its report. The Committee's interventions facilitate social dialogue, requiring governments to review the application of a standard and to share this information with the social partners, who may also provide information. The ensuing social dialogue can lead to further problem-solving and prevention.

The reports of both the Committee of Experts and the Conference Committee are available on the Internet to millions of users. Governments and the social partners thus have an even greater incentive to solve problems in the application of standards in order to avoid critical comments by these bodies. Upon request by member States, the International Labour Office provides substantial technical assistance in drafting and revising national legislation to ensure that it is in conformity with international labour standards. In these ways, the supervisory bodies play an important role in preventing problems in the application of standards from arising in the first place.

REPRESENTATIONS

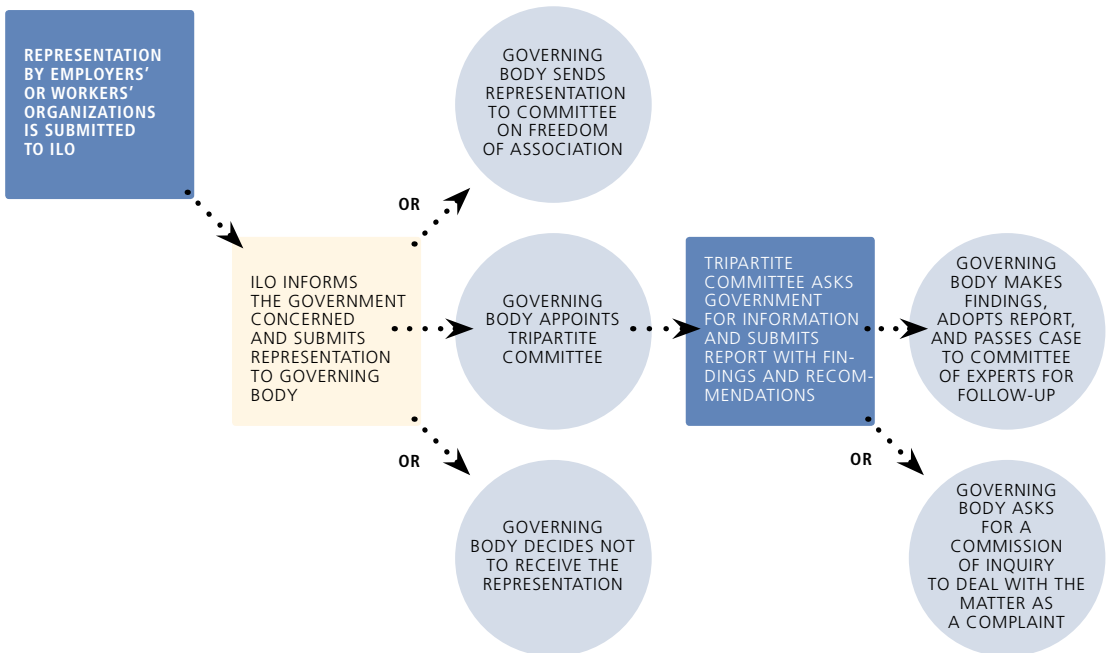
The representation procedure is governed by articles 24 and 25 of the ILO Constitution. It grants an industrial association of employers or of workers the right to present to the ILO Governing Body a representation against any member State which, in its view, “has failed to secure in any respect the effective observance within its jurisdiction of any Convention to which it is a party”. A three-member tripartite committee of the Governing Body may be set up to examine the representation and the government’s response. The report that the committee submits to the Governing Body states the legal and practical aspects of the case, examines the information submitted, and concludes with recommendations. Where the government’s response is not considered satisfactory, the Governing Body is entitled to publish the representation and the response. Representations concerning the application of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 are usually referred for examination to the Committee on Freedom of Association.

Who can make a representation?

Representations under article 24 of the ILO Constitution may be made by national and international employers’ and workers’ associations. Individuals cannot make representations directly to the ILO but can pass on relevant information to their workers’ or employers’ organization, as applicable.



The Representations procedure



Article 24 representations in practice

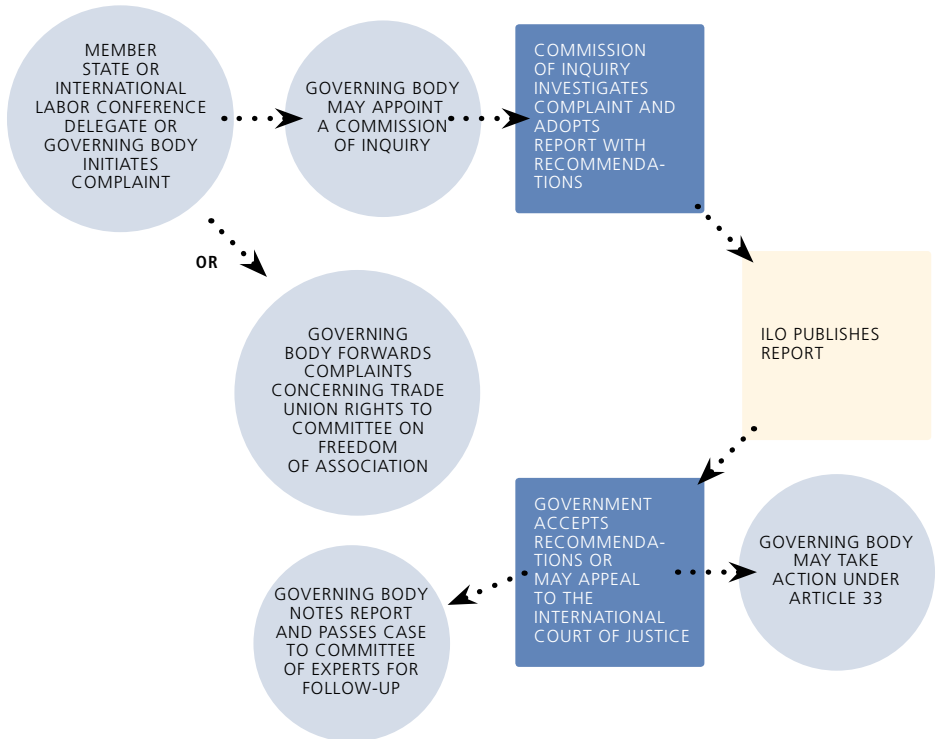
Greece ratified the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81) in 1955. In 1994 it passed a law which decentralized the labour inspectorate and placed it under the responsibility of the autonomous prefectural administrations. The Federation of the Associations of the Public Servants of the Ministry of Labour of Greece (FAMIT) subsequently made a representation to the ILO claiming that the law contravened the principle of Convention No. 81 that labour inspection should be placed under the supervision and control of a central authority. The tripartite committee set up to examine this representation agreed and urged the Greek government to amend its legislation to comply with the Convention. In 1998, the Greek government adopted new laws, bringing the labour inspectorate under a central authority once again. The same year, the Committee of Experts commended the Greek government for its “diligence and close attention” to the recommendations made by the tripartite committee.

COMPLAINTS

The complaint procedure is governed by articles 26 to 34 of the ILO Constitution. Under these provisions a complaint may be filed against a member State for not complying with a ratified Convention by another member State which ratified the same Convention, a delegate to the International Labour Conference, or the Governing Body in its own capacity. Upon receipt of a complaint, the Governing Body may form a Commission of Inquiry, consisting of three independent members, which is responsible for carrying out a full investigation of the complaint, ascertaining all the facts of the case and making recommendations on measures to be taken to address the problems raised by the complaint. A Commission of Inquiry is the ILO's highest-level investigative procedure; it is generally set up when a member State is accused of committing persistent and serious violations and has repeatedly refused to address them. To date, 12 Commissions of Inquiry have been established, the latest one following an article 26 complaint filed against the Government of Zimbabwe in November 2008.

When a country refuses to fulfill the recommendations of a Commission of Inquiry, the Governing Body can take action under article 33 of the ILO Constitution. This provision states that “[i]n the event of any Member failing to carry out within the time specified the recommendations, if any, contained in the report of the Commission of Inquiry, or in the decision of the International Court of Justice, as the case may be, the Governing Body may recommend to the Conference such action as it may deem wise and expedient to secure compliance therewith.” Article 33 was invoked for the first time in ILO history in 2000, when the Governing Body asked the International Labour Conference to take measures to lead Myanmar to end the use of forced labour. An article 26 complaint had been filed against Myanmar in 1996 for violations of the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), 1930, and the resulting Commission of Inquiry had found “widespread and systematic use” of forced labour in the country.

The Complaints procedure



Article 26 complaints in practice

Poland ratified both the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) in 1957. When martial law was declared in the country in 1981, the government suspended the activities of the *Solidarność* trade union and detained or dismissed many of its leaders and members. After the case had been examined by the Committee on Freedom of Association, delegates at the 1982 International Labour Conference filed a complaint under article 26 against Poland. The resulting Commission of Inquiry found grave violations of both Conventions. Based on the Commission's conclusions, the ILO and numerous countries and organizations put pressure on Poland to redress the situation, and in 1989 the Polish government gave *Solidarność* legal status. Lech Walesa, *Solidarność* leader and later President of Poland, noted that "the Commission of Inquiry created by the ILO after the imposition of martial law in my country made significant contributions to the changes which brought democracy to Poland."⁴³

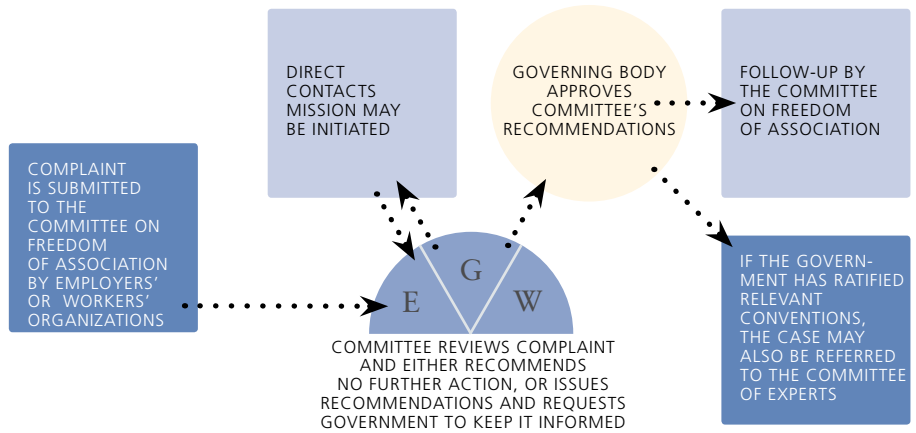
FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The Committee on Freedom of Association

Freedom of association and collective bargaining are among the founding principles of the ILO. Soon after the adoption of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining, the ILO came to the conclusion that the principle of freedom of association needed a further supervisory procedure to ensure compliance with it in countries that had not ratified the relevant Conventions. As a result, in 1951 the ILO set up the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) for the purpose of examining complaints about violations of freedom of association, whether or not the country concerned had ratified the relevant Conventions. Complaints may be brought against a member State by employers' and workers' organizations. The CFA is a Governing Body committee, and is composed of an independent chairperson and three representatives each of governments, employers, and workers. If it decides to receive the case, it establishes the facts in dialogue with the government concerned. If it finds that there has been a violation of freedom of association standards or principles, it issues a report through the Governing Body and makes recommendations on how the situation could be remedied. Governments are subsequently requested to report on the implementation of its recommendations. In cases where the country has ratified the relevant instruments, legislative aspects of the case may be referred to the Committee of Experts. The CFA may also choose to propose a "direct contacts" mission to the government concerned to address the problem directly with government officials and the social partners through a process of dialogue. In more than 60 years of work, the CFA has examined over 3,000 cases. More than 60 countries on five continents have acted on its recommendations and have informed it of positive developments with regard to freedom of association during the past 35 years.⁴⁴



The Freedom of Association procedure



The Committee on Freedom of Association in action

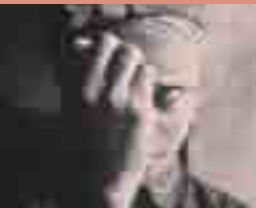
In 1996, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) filed a complaint against the Government of Indonesia for violations of trade union rights, including the denial of the workers' right to establish organizations of their own choosing, the persistent interference by government authorities, the military and employers in trade union activities, ongoing restrictions in collective bargaining and strike action, as well as very serious allegations concerning the arrest and harassment of trade union leaders, together with the disappearance and assassination of workers and unionists. Among the numerous trade union leaders detained during this period were Dita Indah Sari, labour activist of the Democratic Peoples Party and chairwoman of the Centre for Indonesian Workers Struggle, and Muchtar Pakpahan, chairman of the Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union (SBSI). Through the CFA, the international community kept up the pressure on Indonesia for the release of trade union leaders detained because of their trade union activity. Muchtar Pakpahan was released in 1998, followed by Dita Sari one year later, whereupon she was unanimously elected Chairperson of the National Front for Indonesian Workers struggle, the FNPBI. Indonesia's engagement with the ILO marked a turning point for labour rights in the country. In the years since then Indonesia has taken significant steps to improve protection of trade union rights, and has ratified all eight fundamental Conventions. The case of Dita Sari is not unique. In the last few decades, several hundred trade unionists worldwide were released from prison after the CFA examined their cases and formulated recommendations to the governments concerned.

APPLYING CONVENTIONS WHEN COUNTRIES HAVE NOT RATIFIED THEM

General Survey (article 19)

International labour standards are universal instruments adopted by the international community and reflecting common values and principles on work-related issues. While member States can choose whether or not to ratify any Conventions, the ILO considers it important to keep track of developments in all countries, whether or not they have ratified them. Under article 19 of the ILO Constitution, member States are required to report at regular intervals, at the request of the Governing Body, on measures they have taken to give effect to any provision of certain Conventions or Recommendations, and to indicate any obstacles which have prevented or delayed the ratification of a particular Convention.

On the basis of article 19, the Committee of Experts publishes an indepth annual *General Survey* on member States' national law and practice, on a subject chosen by the Governing Body. These surveys are established mainly on the basis of reports received from member States and information transmitted by employers' and workers' organizations. They allow the Committee of Experts to examine the impact of Conventions and Recommendations, to analyze the difficulties indicated by governments in their application, and to identify means of overcoming these obstacles.



Recent General Surveys include:

- 2001 - Night Work of Women in Industry
- 2002 - Dock Work
- 2003 - Protection of Wages
- 2004 - Promoting Employment
- 2005 - Hours of Work
- 2006 - Labour Inspection
- 2007 - Eradication of Forced Labour
- 2008 - Labour Clauses in Public Contracts
- 2009 - Occupational Safety and Health
- 2010 - Employment Instruments
- 2011 - Social Security Instruments
- 2012 - Fundamental Conventions
- 2013 - Labour Relations (Public Service) and Collective Bargaining
- 2014 - Minimum wage fixing instruments
- (forthcoming 2015) - Right of Association and Rural Workers' Organisations instruments

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

The ILO does not just supervise the application of ratified Conventions. It also provides different forms of technical assistance whereby ILO officials or other experts help countries address problems in legislation and practice in order to bring them into line with the obligations under ratified instruments. Forms of technical assistance include advisory and direct contacts missions, during which ILO officials meet government officials to discuss problems in the application of standards with the aim of finding solutions; and promotional activities, including seminars and national workshops, with the purpose of raising awareness of standards, developing national actors' capacity to use them, and providing technical advice on how to apply them to the benefit of all. The ILO also provides assistance in drafting national legislation in line with its standards.

A worldwide network of international labour standards specialists

Many of these technical assistance activities are carried out by the ILO's international labour standards specialists who are assigned to ILO offices located around the world. Standards specialists meet government officials, employers' and workers' organizations to provide assistance with new ratifications of Conventions and reporting obligations, to discuss solutions to problems raised by the supervisory bodies, and to review draft legislation to ensure that it conforms with international labour standards. International labour standards specialists are stationed in:

Africa: Pretoria, Cairo, Dakar, Yaoundé

Americas: Lima, San José, Santiago

Caribbean: Port of Spain

Arab States: Beirut

East Asia: Bangkok,

South Asia: New Delhi

Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Moscow



ILO International Training Centre

The International Labour Organization and the Italian Government established the International Training Centre in 1964 in Turin, Italy, as an advanced vocational training institute.

The International Training Centre offers training on international labour standards for government officials, employers, workers, lawyers, judges and legal educators, as well as specialized courses on labour standards, productivity improvement and enterprise development, international labour standards and globalization, and the rights of women workers. The Centre contributes to achieving the ILO's goal of decent work for women and men.

The Centre also hosts the Maritime Labour Academy, a programme of specialized courses aimed at strengthening the capacity of governments, shipowners and seafarers in the application of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

ILO DECLARATION ON FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTS AT WORK AND ITS FOLLOW-UP

In 1998 the ILO created a special promotional measure to strengthen the application of the four principles and associated rights that are considered fundamental for social justice. By adopting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, ILO member States recognized that they have an obligation to work towards realizing certain basic values that are inherent in ILO membership, namely freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. This obligation exists even if they have not yet been able to ratify the eight fundamental Conventions which embody these principles. At the same time the ILO itself has an obligation to provide assistance needed to achieve these objectives.

A follow-up to the Declaration was adopted at the same time to help determine the needs of states to improve their application of the above principles and rights. Member States are required to submit annual reports on all the fundamental rights for which they have not ratified the corresponding ILO Conventions. The reports are examined by the Governing Body with the help of a panel of independent experts, whose comments are published in the Introduction to the Annual Review of reports. In addition, the Director-General prepares a Global Report on one of the four sets of principles and rights each year to analyze the situation around the world, both for ratifying and non-ratifying countries, and to suggest new avenues for ILO technical assistance. The International Labour Conference examines this report, and the Governing Body consequently sets out a plan of action for technical cooperation for the following four-year period. The Declaration and its follow-up are designed to promote the principles and rights it embodies and to facilitate the ratification of the fundamental Conventions through dialogue and technical assistance. The purpose of the Declaration and its follow-up was not to create a parallel set of standards; rather, it was to assist member States to achieve full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work, including ultimate ratification of all the fundamental Conventions. Once this is achieved, all member States will have been brought under the regular ILO supervisory system with respect to these instruments.

2008 DECLARATION ON SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR A FAIR GLOBALIZATION

Amid widespread uncertainty in the world of work, ranging from financial turmoil and economic downturn to growing unemployment, informality and insufficient social protection, the governments, workers and employers of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted in June 2008 a landmark Declaration designed to strengthen the ILO's capacity to promote its *Decent Work Agenda* and forge an effective response to the growing challenges of globalization. This was the third major statement of principles and policies adopted by the International Labour Conference since the ILO's Constitution of 1919. It built on the Philadelphia Declaration of 1944 and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 1998. The 2008 Declaration expresses the contemporary vision of the ILO's mandate in the era of globalization.

The Declaration expresses the universality of the *Decent Work Agenda*: all Members of the Organization must pursue policies based on the strategic objectives – employment, social protection, social dialogue, and rights at work. At the same time, it stresses a holistic and integrated approach by recognizing that these objectives are “inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive”, ensuring the role of international labour standards as a useful means of achieving all of them.

The Declaration also stresses the need to promote the ILO’s standard-setting policy as a cornerstone of ILO activities by enhancing its relevance to the world of work, as well as ensuring the role of standards as a useful means of achieving the constitutional objectives of the Organization. The Declaration specifies that how member States achieve the ILO’s strategic objectives is a question that must be determined by each Member subject to its existing international obligations and the fundamental principles and rights at work with due regard, among others, to the principles and provisions of international labour standards.

The Declaration includes a follow-up mechanism to ensure the means by which the Organization will assist the Members in their efforts to promote the *Decent Work Agenda*, including a review of the ILO’s institutional practices and governance; regular discussion by the International Labour Conference responding to realities and needs in member States and assessing the results of ILO activities; voluntary country reviews, technical assistance and advisory services; and strengthening research capacities, information collection and sharing.

Key ILO bodies and documents
References

4

RESOURCES

“We cannot develop at the expense of social justice.
We cannot compete without a floor of basic human standards.
If this is true inside our own society, it is true for the world as a whole.”

– Nelson Mandela, President of the African National Congress, 1994.⁴⁵

As this booklet has tried to show, international labour standards are important tools for ensuring that the global economy provides benefits and opportunities to all. From freedom of association to social security, from combating child labour to promoting vocational training, international labour standards provide for dignified and decent working conditions and related economic benefits at the national and at the enterprise level as well. The supervisory system ensures that countries respect their obligations under the Conventions they have ratified and, more generally, their obligations under the ILO Constitution.

The international labour standards system continues to grow and develop to respond to current world needs. There have been many cases of progress to which the international labour standards system has contributed. But there is much work left to do. While the international labour standards system is primarily a tool to be used by national governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations, the wider public can play a role as well. Individuals, non-governmental organizations, enterprises and activists can raise awareness of the system, encourage their governments to ratify Conventions, and work with the appropriate employers’ and workers’ organizations to identify problems in the application of standards. It is hoped that this brief introduction to international labour standards will not only empower ILO constituents but allow society as a whole to make use of these powerful tools for development.

The following pages provide an overview of some of the most important international labour standards documents and sources of further information.

KEY ILO BODIES AND DOCUMENTS

- Conventions and Recommendations
- ILO Constitution
- Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations

Annual report containing:

General Report: comments on member States' compliance with reporting obligations, cases of progress, and the relationship between international labour standards and the multilateral system (Report III (Part 1A))

Observations: comments on the application of Conventions in ratifying states (Report III (Part 1A))

General Survey: examination of law and practice in a particular subject area, in member States that have or have not ratified relevant Conventions (Report III (Part 1B))

Information document on ratifications and standards-related activities (Report III (Part 2)).
- Report of the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards

Report containing:

General Report

Examination of individual cases

Available in the Provisional Record of the International Labour Conference and published separately as Extracts from the Record of Proceedings of the International Labour Conference.
- Report of Committee on Freedom of Association

Published three times a year as a Governing Body document and in the *ILO's Official Bulletin*.
- Reports of Committees established to examine representations (art. 24)

Published in Governing Body documents.
- Reports of Commissions of Inquiry (art. 26)

Published in Governing Body documents and in the *ILO's Official Bulletin*.

All of the above are available in the NORMLEX database at:
<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en>

- **Governing Body documents**, including documents of the Committee on Legal Issues and International Labour Standards Available at:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reln/gb/index.htm>
- **International Labour Conference documents**, including preparatory reports for the adoption of Conventions and Recommendations
Available at:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reln/ilc/index.htm>
- **Documents under the Follow-up to the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.**
Available at:
<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.INDEXPAGE>

ILO documents are also available through ILO offices and depository libraries.

Selected publications

General Works on International Labour Standards

- **Guide to international labour standards (2014)** – Provides summaries of the contents of ILO Conventions and Recommendations by subject matter.
- **Les normes internationales du travail: un patrimoine pour l'avenir. Mélanges en l'honneur de Nicolas Valticos.** – Comprises a collection of legal essays in honour of former ILO Assistant Director-General, Nicolas Valticos (1918-2003). Twenty-nine articles exclusively dedicated to standard setting and supervision of international labour standards.
- **Handbook of procedures relating to international labour Conventions and Recommendations.** – This Handbook describes the procedures operating within the International Labour Organization in relation to the adoption and implementation of Conventions and Recommendations.
- **Employers' handbook on ILO standards-related activities** – Provides guidance on ILO standards-related activities with a focus on issues and questions which are of particular interest to employers.
- **International Labour Standards Electronic Library – ILSE 2014 CD-ROM (E/F/S)** Comprises basic ILO documents on International Labour Standards.

Standard-setting activities and supervisory system of the ILO

- **The Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference:** A dynamic and impact built on decades of dialogue and persuasion, 2011 - On the occasion of the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference, and the 85th anniversary of the Conference Committee on the Application of Standards, this study aims at emphasizing the significance of the work carried out by this body.
- **The Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendation: its dynamic and impact** – Describes the composition and functioning of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations and reviews cases of progress in relation to the application of eight fundamental Conventions. Also lists cases of progress in relation to the implementation of the “priority and technical” Conventions from 1988 to 2002 and the fundamental Conventions from 1978 to 2003.
- **The Committee of Freedom of Association: Its impact over 50 years** – Based on a selection of examples from the past 25 years, examines the manner in which the Committee on Freedom of Association of the Governing Body of the ILO carries out its supervisory role.
- **Protecting Labour Rights as Human Rights: Present and Future of International Supervision (proceedings)** – Proceedings of the international colloquium on the 80th anniversary of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Geneva, 24–25 November 2006 (Articles in English, French and Spanish)

Freedom of Association

- **Freedom of association** – Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO. Fifth (revised) edition, 2006 – Summarizes the decisions and principles of the Committee on Freedom of Association up to its 339th report (November 2005).
- **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining: 1994 General Survey of the Reports on the Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize Convention (No. 87), 1948 and the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98), 1949.**
- **ILO principles concerning the right to strike** – Examines the principles laid down by the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association concerning the right to strike, covering inter alia political strikes, compensatory guarantees if the right to strike is denied, and protection against reprisals for strike action.
- **Freedom of association: A user's guide** – Standards, principles and procedures of the International Labour Organization – Serves as a companion volume to "ILO law on freedom of association: standards and procedures" (Geneva, 1995). Describes the practical influence and impact of the ILO's freedom of association standards and principles and the use of procedures for their enforcement.
- **ILO Law on Freedom of Association: Standards and procedures** – Part one contains texts of and extracts from ILO Conventions and ILO Recommendations dealing with freedom of association and labour relations. Part two contains extracts from the regulations governing the procedure of the ILO's supervisory bodies.

Child Labour and forced labour

- **Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour, 2014** – The study investigates the underlying factors that drive forced labour, of which a major one is illegal profits. Figures include a breakdown of profits by area of forced labour and by region.
- **Ending Child Labour in Domestic Work and Protecting Young Workers from Abusive Working Conditions, 2013** – The report provides detailed information on current data regarding the estimated number of child domestic workers worldwide. It examines the ambiguity of the working relationship, the discrimination and isolation associated with the practice, the hazards and risks of this type of work, as well as the vulnerability to violence and to abuse to which child domestic workers are too often exposed.
- **World Report on Child Labour: Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour, 2013** – This new report brings together research on child labour and social protection, identifying policies that are designed to achieve multiple social goals.

Seafarers and Maritime Issues

- **The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006: A Legal Primer to an Emerging International Regime 2011** - M. L. McConnell, D. Devlin, C. Doumbia-Henry - Discusses the MLC, 2006 within the contexts of labour and maritime law, and provides an annotated version of the text.
- **Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (2009)** - The guidelines contained in this book are an important international resource for implementing port State responsibilities under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC). They were adopted by the ILO in September 2008 together with Guidelines for flag State inspections under the MLC, 2006.
- **Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (2009)** - The Guidelines for flag State inspections under the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (MLC, 2006), contained in this book are an important resource for implementing flag State responsibilities under the MLC, 2006. They were adopted by the ILO in September 2008 together with Guidelines for port State control officers carrying out inspections under the MLC, 2006.
- **Current Maritime Labour Law Issues – An Internationally Uniform Identity Document for Seafarers.** (First published in the World Maritime University Journal of Maritime Affairs, 2003, vol. 2, No. 2)
- **From Tankers to Trawlers: The International Labour Organization's New Work in Fishing Convention, Ocean Development and International Law,** vol. 39, 2008, pp. 119-128.

Maternity Protection

- **Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world, 2014 –** The study reviews national law and practice on both maternity and paternity at work in 185 countries and territories including leave, benefits, employment protection, health protection, breastfeeding arrangements at work and childcare.

Informal economy

- **The Informal Economy and Decent Work: A policy resource guide supporting transitions to formality, 2014** – This practical policy resource brings together knowledge, policy innovations and good practices in addressing the informal economy and facilitating the transition to formality.

Trade and labour rights

- **The Social Dimensions of Free Trade Agreements, 2013** – The report provides a comprehensive review of all existing trade agreements that include social provisions and discusses impacts for enterprises and workers. It also helps assess the challenges for arising from the multiplication of trade agreements that include different social provisions.
- **The comments of the ILO's Supervisory bodies: Usefulness in the context of the sanction-based dimension of labour provisions in US free trade agreements, 2013** – This paper looks at recent complaints under the labour chapters of three US trade agreements – the CAFTA-DR, the US-Bahrain and the US-Peru FTAs – and undertakes a preliminary analysis of the use of the comments of the ILO's supervisory bodies in the regulation mechanisms of labour provisions contained in those trade agreements.

Labour Administration and inspection

- **Labour Administration in Uncertain Times: Policy, Practice and Institutions, 2013** – The 2008 financial crisis marked the beginning of a prolonged and ongoing period of extreme economic turbulence that has created multiple challenges for both governments and national systems of labour administration. Difficult economic conditions are encouraging a re-evaluation of established policies and institutions in the areas of labour, employment, social protection and industrial relations.

Equal pay

- **Equal Pay - An introductory guide, 2013** – Ensuring that the work done by women and men is valued fairly and ending pay discrimination is essential to achieving gender equality. However, pay inequality continues to persist and gender pay gaps in some instances have stagnated or even increased.

Internet resources

- **NORMLEX - Information System on International Labour Standards:** New information system which brings together information on International Labour Standards (such as ratification information, reporting requirements, comments of the ILO's supervisory bodies, etc.) as well as national labour and social security laws. NORMLEX provides comprehensive and user friendly information on these topics and includes the NATLEX database as well as the information which was previously contained in the former APPLIS, ILOLEX and LibSynd databases.

All these information resources are available at:

www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/

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The International Labour Organization's Conventions and Recommendations establish the international legal framework for ensuring social justice in today's global economy. Adopted by representatives of governments, employers and workers, international labour standards cover a wide range of subjects, including freedom of association and collective bargaining, forced labour, child labour, equality of opportunity and treatment, tripartite consultation, labour administration and inspection, employment policy and promotion, vocational guidance and training, employment security, social policy, wages, working time, occupational safety and health, social security, maternity protection, domestic workers, migrant workers, seafarers, fishers, dockworkers, indigenous and tribal peoples, and other specific categories of workers. The ILO disposes of a number of unique supervisory and complaint mechanisms which ensure that international labour standards are applied.

Aimed at a non-specialist audience, this revised booklet provides an introduction to international labour standards and discusses their importance in today's global economy, the subjects they cover, how they are applied and supervised, and where further information can be sought.

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