



International  
Labour  
Organization

## FACTS ON *Decent Work*

*“The primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.”*

Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

At the 2005 United Nations World Summit, Heads of State and Government declared, *“We strongly support a fair globalization and resolve to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our national and international macroeconomic policies as well as poverty reduction strategies. These measures should also encompass the elimination of child labour. We also resolve to protect the human rights of workers.”*

The Decent Work concept was formulated by the ILO's constituents – governments and employers' and workers' organizations – as a means to identify the Organization's major priorities and reform and modernize its approach for the Twenty-First Century. In a relatively short period of time, it has led to an international consensus that productive employment and decent work are key elements to achieving poverty reduction. A number of regional summits of government leaders have endorsed the approach as a basis for their international cooperation programmes. It has also found widespread support amongst civil society organizations.

The Decent Work Agenda is a practical agenda rooted in the real world and founded on the understanding that work is a source of personal dignity, family stability, peace in the community, democracies that deliver for people, and economic growth that expands opportunities for productive jobs and enterprise development. It is an integrated approach that makes connections among different policy areas.

Decent Work reflects a number of priorities on the social, economic and political agenda of countries and the international system:

- ◆ **Fair globalization** – Rather than driving people into the informal economy or creating massive migration, global expansion must find ways to deliver opportunities for decent work where people live.
- ◆ **Poverty reduction** – Employment creation and poverty reduction are inextricably linked. Work is the way out of poverty, and as the ILO's Constitution states, “Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere”.
- ◆ **Security** – A community at work is a community at peace. This holds true at local, national, regional and global levels.

### *Decent work deficits*

The world today is facing a number of decent work “deficits”. These come in the form of unemployment and underemployment, poor quality and unproductive jobs, unsafe work and insecure income, rights that are denied and gender inequality. Many migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, lack representation and voice, and have inadequate protection from income loss during sickness, disability and old age.

What are some of the indicators of the decent work deficit?

- ◆ Half of the world's workers are unable lift themselves and their families above the US\$2 per day per person poverty line.
- ◆ Much of the world has a significant “gender gap” in both quantity and quality of employment. Women are more likely than men to work in the informal economy, with little or no social protection and a high degree of insecurity.
- ◆ There are over 88 million unemployed youth (aged 15 to 24) around the world, comprising nearly half of the world's total unemployment, though this age group makes up only 25 per cent of the working age population.
- ◆ Labour migration is on the rise. There are more than 86 million migrant workers in the world, 34 million of them in developing regions.
- ◆ Global economic growth is increasingly failing to translate into new and better jobs that would lead to a reduction in poverty.

## *The Decent Work Agenda*

Putting the Decent Work Agenda into practice is achieved through the implementation of its four strategic objectives with gender equality as a crosscutting objective;

Creating Jobs – an economy that generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, job creation and sustainable livelihoods;

Guaranteeing rights at work – obtain recognition and respect for the rights of workers. All workers, and in particular disadvantaged or poor workers need representation, participation, and good laws that are enforced and work for, not against, their interests;

Providing basic social protection – marginalization and poverty mean that those most in need do not have minimum protection against low or declining standards of living; and

Promoting dialogue and conflict resolution – people in poverty understand the need to negotiate and know dialogue is the way to solve problems peacefully.

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◆ **Social inclusion** – Achieving equality of opportunity and overcoming discrimination of all types in employment are crucial to fully realizing people's capabilities.

◆ **Dignity** – Labour is not a commodity. Labour costs reflect human beings for whom work is a source of dignity and family well-being.

◆ **Diversity** – Policies must be tailored to the specific needs of a country – one size does not fit all.

## *The ILO: Making decent work a global goal and a national reality*

The overall goal of decent work is to effect positive change in people's lives at the national and local levels. The ILO provides support through integrated decent work country programmes developed in coordination with ILO constituents. They define the priorities and the targets within national development frameworks and aim to tackle major decent work deficits through efficient programmes that embrace each of the strategic objectives.

The ILO works with other partners within and beyond the UN family to provide in-depth expertise and key policy instruments for the design and implementation of these programmes. It also provides support for building the institutions needed to carry them forward and for measuring progress. The balance within these programmes differs from country to country, reflecting their needs, resources and priorities.

Progress also requires action at the global level. The decent work agenda offers a basis for a more just and stable framework for global development. The ILO works to develop decent work-oriented approaches to economic and social policy in partnership with the principal institutions and actors of the multilateral system and the global economy.

