



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

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 to modernize its approach for the twenty-first century. It is based 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. In a relatively short time this concept has led to an international consensus among governments, employers, unions and civil society organizations that productive employment and Decent Work are key elements to achieving a fair globalization and the reduction of poverty.

At the UN World Summit in 2005, 150 global leaders agreed to place full and productive employment and Decent Work as a central objective of relevant national and international policies, spelling out the central role of Decent Work in development strategies and poverty reduction.

In 2006, at the high-level segment of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), ministers reaffirmed that, “Opportunities for men and women to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity are essential to ensuring the eradication of hunger and poverty, the improvement of the economic and social well-being for all, the achievement of sustained economic growth and sustainable development of all nations, and a fully inclusive and equitable globalization”. They requested UN bodies and invited financial institutions to support efforts to mainstream the goals of full and productive employment and Decent Work for all in their policies, programmes and activities. They also encouraged relevant agencies to collaborate actively in the development of a toolkit to promote Decent Work being developed by the ILO for the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

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

◆ **Fair globalization** – The current model is not creating enough jobs where people live. Global growth must be reshaped to deliver increased opportunities for Decent Work, especially for young women and men.

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 85 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 cross-cutting objective;

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

Guaranteeing rights at work – to 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;

Extending social protection – to promote both inclusion and productivity by ensuring that men and women enjoy working conditions which are safe, allow adequate free time and rest, take into account family and social values, provide for adequate compensation in case of lost or reduced income and permit access to adequate healthcare; and

Promoting dialogue and conflict resolution – people in poverty understand the need to negotiate and know dialogue is the way to solve problems peacefully. Social dialogue, involving strong and independent workers' and employers' organizations, is central to increasing productivity and avoiding disputes at work, and to building cohesive societies.

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◆ **Poverty reduction** – Employment creation and poverty reduction are inextricably linked. Decent Work is the best route 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.

◆ **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. Human beings for whom work is a source of dignity and family well-being have rights that must be respected. They are not just a part of the cost of production.

◆ **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.