



International  
Labour  
Organization





Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

The International Labour Office is headed by a Director-General appointed by the Governing Body. Since 1919, the ILO has been led by: Albert Thomas of France (1919-1932), Harold Butler of the United Kingdom (1932-1938), John Winant of the United States (1939-1941), Edward Phelan of Ireland (1941-1948), David Morse of the United States (1948-1970), Wilfred Jenks of the United Kingdom (1970-1973), Francis Blanchard of France (1973-1989), Michel Hansenne of Belgium (1989-1999), and since March 1999 by Juan Somavia of Chile.



ILO Headquarters, Geneva

# International Labour Organization

“The failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries.”  
*ILO Constitution*

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is built on the constitutional principle that universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.

The ILO has generated such hallmarks of industrial society as the eight-hour working day, maternity protection, child-labour laws, and a range of policies which promote workplace safety and peaceful industrial relations.

The ILO is the international institutional framework which makes it possible to address such issues – and to find solutions allowing working conditions to improve everywhere. No country or industry could have afforded to introduce any of these in the absence of similar and simultaneous action by its competitors.

The first International Labour Conference was held in Washington in October–November 1919. Six Conventions and six Recommendations were adopted (including Convention No. 1 on the duration of the work day).

## Origins of the ILO

The International Labour Organization emerged with the League of Nations from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. It was founded to give expression to the growing concern for social reform after World War I, and the conviction that any reform had to be conducted at an international level.

After World War II, a dynamic restatement and enlargement of the ILO's basic goals and principles was made in the Declaration of Philadelphia. The Declaration anticipated postwar growth in national independence, and heralded the birth of large-scale technical cooperation with the developing world.

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





## How the ILO works

The ILO has a tripartite structure unique in the United Nations, in which employers' and workers' representatives – the “social partners” of the economy – have an equal voice with those of governments in shaping its policies and programmes.

The ILO also encourages this tripartism within its member States by promoting a “social dialogue” between trade unions and employers in formulating, and where appropriate, implementing national policy on social, economic, and many other issues.

Minimum international labour standards and the broad policies of the ILO are set by the International Labour Conference, which meets annually. Every two years, the Conference adopts the ILO's biennial work programme and budget, which is financed by member States.

The Conference also provides an international forum for discussion of world labour and social problems. Each member country has the right to send four delegates to the Conference, two from the government and one each representing workers and employers. These delegates are free to speak and vote independently. Between annual sessions of the Conference, the work of the ILO is guided by the Governing Body of 28 government members and 14 worker and 14 employer members.

The ILO secretariat, operational headquarters, research centre and publishing house, are based in the International Labour Office, Geneva. Administration and management are decentralized in regional, area, and branch offices in more than 40 countries.

The work of the Governing Body and of the Office is aided by tripartite committees covering major industries. It is also supported by committees of experts on such matters as vocational training, management development, occupational safety and health, industrial relations, workers' education, and special problems of women and young workers.

Regional meetings of the ILO member States are held periodically to examine matters of special interest to the regions concerned.





## What the ILO does

The ILO has four principal strategic objectives:

- To promote and realize standards, and fundamental principles and rights at work.
- To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment.
- To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all.
- To strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

These objectives are realized in a number of ways:

1. Formulation of international policies and programmes to promote basic human rights, improve working and living conditions, and enhance employment opportunities.
2. Creation of international labour standards – backed by a unique system to supervise their application – to serve as guidelines for national authorities in putting these policies into action.
3. An extensive programme of international technical cooperation, formulated and implemented in an active partnership with constituents, to help countries in making these policies effective in practice.
4. Training, education, research, and publishing activities to help advance all of these efforts.



# Policies and Programmes

President Roosevelt receiving a delegation from the International Labour Conference in Washington in 1944, following the Conference's work in Philadelphia.

## Declaration of Philadelphia

In 1944, the International Labour Conference met in Philadelphia, USA, and adopted the Declaration of Philadelphia. This redefined the aims and purpose of the ILO by adopting the following principles:

- Labour is not a commodity.
- Freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress.
- Poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere.
- 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 of equal opportunity.



## Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

In 1998, the International Labour Conference adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to “respect, to promote and to realize in good faith” the rights of workers and employers to freedom of association and the effective right to collective bargaining.

It also commits member States to work towards the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation.

The Declaration emphasizes that all member States have an obligation to respect the fundamental principles involved, whether or not they have ratified the relevant Conventions.



# International Labour Standards

## **ILO Conventions and Recommendations**

One of the ILO's original and most important functions is the adoption by the tripartite International Labour Conference (employers, workers and governments) of Conventions and Recommendations which set international standards. Through ratifications by member States, these Conventions create binding obligations to implement their provisions. Recommendations provide guidance on policy, legislation, and practice.

Since 1919, Conventions and Recommendations have been adopted covering practically all issues relating to the world of work. These include certain basic human rights (notably freedom of association, the right to organize and bargain collectively, the abolition of forced labour and child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in employment), labour administration, industrial relations, employment policy, working conditions, social security, occupational safety and health, employment of women, and employment of special categories such as migrant workers and seafarers.

Each member State is required to submit all Conventions and Recommendations adopted by the Conference to the competent national authorities for a decision on action to be taken.

The ratifications of these Conventions have continued to increase in number. The ILO has established a supervisory procedure to ensure their application in law and practice, which is the most advanced of all such international procedures. It is based on objective evaluation by independent experts of the manner in which obligations are complied with, and on examination of cases by the ILO tripartite bodies. There is a special procedure to investigate complaints of infringement of freedom of association.



## Key ILO Conventions

No. 29

### **Forced Labour Convention (1930)**

Requires the suppression of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms. Certain exceptions are permitted, such as military service, properly supervised convict labour, and emergencies such as wars, fires, earthquakes.

No. 87

### **Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (1948)**

Establishes the right of all workers and employers to form and join organizations of their own choosing without prior authorization, and lays down a series of guarantees for the free functioning of organizations without interference by public authorities.

No. 98

### **Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (1949)**

Provides for protection against anti-union discrimination, for protection of workers' and employers' organizations against acts of interference by each other, and for measures to promote collective bargaining.

No. 100

### **Equal Remuneration Convention (1951)**

Calls for equal pay and benefits for men and women for work of equal value.

No. 105

### **Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (1957)**

Prohibits the use of any form of forced or compulsory labour as a means of political coercion or education, punishment for the expression of political or ideological views, workforce mobilization, labour discipline, punishment for participation in strikes, or discrimination.

No. 111

### **Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958)**

Calls for a national policy to eliminate discrimination in access to employment, training, and working conditions, on grounds of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, and to promote equality of opportunity and treatment.

No. 138

### **Minimum Age Convention (1973)**

Aims at the abolition of child labour, stipulating that the minimum age for admission to employment shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling.

No. 182

### **Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999)**

Calls for immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour which include slavery and similar practices, forced recruitment for use in armed conflict, use in prostitution and pornography, any illicit activity, as well as work which is likely to harm the health, safety, and morals of children.





## Focus on child labour

Child labour is a pressing social, economic and human rights issue. As many as 250 million children worldwide are thought to be working, deprived of adequate education, good health, and basic freedoms. Individual children pay the highest price, but countries suffer as well. Ending child labour is a goal in itself; but it is also a powerful way of promoting economic and human development.

The ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), containing the principle of the effective abolition of child labour, is strengthened by adoption of a new Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), calling for immediate measures to eliminate as a matter of urgency all of the worst forms of child labour – ranging from slavery and compulsory labour to use of a child in any illicit activity, and any work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

As the world has awakened to the abuses of child labour, the movement against it has evolved into a global cause virtually unprecedented in its pace and intensity. It is a movement which transcends political boundaries, languages, cultures and spiritual traditions. Every segment of civil society – governments, employers, trade unions, NGOs, and religious organizations – has joined together to declare that exploitative child labour must end.

The International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) currently manages over 1,000 programmes worldwide promoting alternatives to child labour.





## Gender and jobs

Gender equality is a key element of the ILO agenda of Decent Work for All Women and Men. Gender equality, along with development, is one of the two cross-cutting issues of the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work agenda.

The ILO's approach to gender equality is to mainstream gender concerns in all its policies and programmes.

Women have transformed the labour markets of the world. In some cases, they have succeeded in obtaining greater opportunities and economic autonomy. Yet, gender inequalities still permeate every aspect of the employment problem. Women still form the majority of unpaid, atypical, or discouraged workers in most countries.



The ILO is committed to an integrated policy on women and work. This involves a number of responses, including:

- The International Programme on More and Better Jobs for Women. This programme promotes more jobs for women through employment creation, training, entrepreneurship development, improvement in access to the labour market, and equality of opportunity. It promotes better jobs through equal pay, occupational desegregation, health and safety, improved working conditions for non-standard employment, social security, family-friendly workplaces, and protection for vulnerable workers.
- The Capacity-building Programme on Gender, Poverty and Employment. This programme focuses on enhancing women's access to quality jobs, strengthening their bargaining and negotiating power, and providing innovative ways of increasing social protection, especially in the informal sector.



## Decent employment and income

Productive, freely-chosen employment is at the core of the ILO's mandate. Without productive employment, achieving decent living standards, social and economic development, and personal fulfilment remain illusory. Globalization has brought both prosperity and inequalities, testing the limits of our collective responsibility. Even so, the Organization remains committed to achieving full employment worldwide.

The ILO's mission is to help people around the world find decent work – in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. It does this through permanent contact with workers, employers, and governments – the ILO's constituents – helping forge new and innovative employment, labour market, and training policies.

Concern for the social costs of globalization increases the need for better international coordination of macroeconomics policies which can diminish its harmful consequences. The ILO is committed to providing research, analysis, and advice to its constituents, as well as to such stakeholders as banking, investment, trade and enterprise development specialists, and business managers, on how to create decent work. This includes promoting small enterprises, microfinance, and effective training systems.

ILO employment objectives include:

- Equipping constituents to analyse economic and labour market developments, and elaborate and negotiate effective employment promotion policies and programmes on the global and regional level
- Boosting employment through small enterprise development
- Helping women get more and better jobs
- Effectively implementing policies and programmes upgrading informal sector activities
- Advising in the transition from centrally planned to market economies, particularly with respect to employment, labour market, and human resource policies
- Adopting or strengthening targeted programmes enabling groups such as young workers, the disabled, migrants, and indigenous populations to find decent employment

The focus on small enterprises is a key element in the ILO approach to job creation, an important aspect of which concerns enterprise restructuring.

# Technical Cooperation

Since the early 1950s, the ILO has been providing technical cooperation to countries on all continents and at all stages of economic development. In the last decade, an average of some US\$130 million was spent annually on technical cooperation projects. The projects are implemented through close cooperation between recipient countries, donors, and the ILO, which maintains a network of area and regional offices worldwide.

The overall purpose of ILO technical cooperation is the implementation of the Decent Work agenda at a national level, assisting constituents to make this concept a reality for all men and women. An extensive network of offices throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East provides technical guidance on policy issues, and assistance in the design and implementation of development programmes.





## Wide-ranging programmes

Training entrepreneurs in small business administration, strengthening social security systems, assisting in the reintegration of ex-combatants into the national economy, assisting trade unions in occupational safety and health, setting up cooperatives in rural areas, working with governments to revise labour laws. These are just a few examples of the ILO's vast range of technical cooperation programmes operating in some 140 countries and territories.

The focus of these programmes is on the areas covered by the ILO's four strategic objectives: the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work, employment, social protection, and the strengthening of tripartism and social dialogue.

Within this framework, the major portion of ILO technical cooperation is in the areas of development policies and programmes for poverty alleviation through job creation, and enterprise and cooperative development.

Particular attention is being paid to capacity-building and strengthening of the programmes' constituents, in particular of workers' and employers' organizations, and to the mainstreaming of gender. The protection of workers at the workplace and the development of social security systems are other areas of assistance.

The ILO's adoption of the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work has given a new impetus to the technical cooperation programmes in standards-related areas such as the promotion of freedom of association, social dialogue and collective bargaining, and to activities leading to the eradication of child labour – especially in its worst forms.

# Training, Education, Research, Publishing

## **International Training Centre**

With its large residential training facility located in Turin, Italy, the International Training Centre provides a wide variety of programmes in areas of priority concern to the ILO and the United Nations system at large.

Designed to support economic and social development of member States and their constituents, the Centre seeks to assemble, package and deliver the best thinking, practice and experience concerning fundamental principles and rights at work, employment and income opportunities for women and men, social protection for all, management of the development process, tripartism, and social dialogue.

It offers training/learning opportunities and related services to decision-makers, managers, practitioners and trainers from governments, workers' organizations, employers' organizations and their partner institutions. It has partnerships with regional and national training institutions and its services are available to the United Nations system as a whole, including ILO staff.

To date, over 90,000 women and men from 170 nations have benefited from its services since it opened in 1965. The annual number of activities exceeds 300 standard courses, customized learning events, comprehensive training projects, advisory services, and training material design and production.

Around half the activities take place on-campus and the rest in the field. Besides group training, the Centre organizes, on request, learning programmes for individuals who are placed in public and private institutions and organizations. Increasingly, it uses information technology, including the Internet, to offer distance learning and tutoring services.

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## **International Institute for Labour Studies**

The ILO International Institute for Labour Studies in Geneva promotes policy research and public discussion on emerging issues of concern to the ILO and its constituents – labour, business and government.

The organizing theme of the Institute's programmes is the notion of "decent work". The Institute's programmes seek to contribute to the development of the analytical and empirical foundations of decent work and a broader understanding of the policy instruments necessary to implement it in practice.

The Institute provides three major facilities:

- A global forum on social policy, enabling governments, business and labour to interact informally with the academic community and other opinion-makers.
- International research programmes and networks linking academics with business, labour, and government practitioners, to explore emerging policy issues of potential relevance for the ILO and contribute to policy formulation.
- Educational programmes to assist trade unions, employers' organizations and labour administrations in developing their institutional capacities for research, analysis, and policy formulation in the economic and social fields.

The Institute's means of action include: research, social policy forums, public lectures, courses and seminars, internship programmes, a visiting scholar programme, the Phelan Fellowship programme, and publications. It also organizes the Social Policy Lectures, endowed by the ILO's Nobel Peace Prize, and held, by rotation, in major universities of the world.

## ILO Publications

ILO publications are principally aimed at policy-makers and others concerned with the changing nature of work. They cover employment, social security, occupational safety and health, industrial relations, labour law, training, enterprise development, and other aspects of the world of work. Recent publications report on research on youth unemployment, women in management, the social aspects of globalization, and migrant workers.



The flagship **World Employment Report** provides up-to-date analysis on significant social and economic trends.



The 4th edition of the **ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Safety and Health** (available as a four-volume print version and on CD-ROM) reflects the state-of-the-art and serves as a worldwide reference.

The ILO also publishes statistical, legal, and bibliographic materials in both printed and interactive electronic form.



The **Yearbook of Labour Statistics**, a comprehensive survey of annual data from all parts of the world, covers the economically active population, employment, unemployment, hours of work, and consumer prices.



**Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)** provides analyses of data from the Yearbook and other international references, and is available online, in print version, and on CD-ROM.



The ILO journal, **International Labour Review**, is published quarterly in English, French and Spanish. It features current policy analysis on employment and labour issues. The ILO also publishes **Labour Education** and the magazine **World of Work**, aimed at all those who follow developments in the field.

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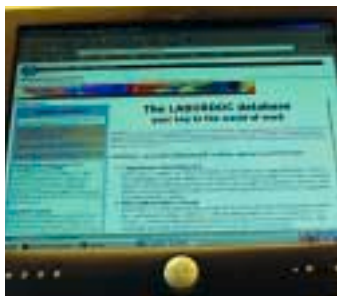


## Library and Information Services

Most of the ILO's information services are based on an information network connected to the ILO Library in Geneva. The network seeks to enhance the capacity of ILO constituents, ILO staff and ILO partner institutions to make effective use of the ILO's information resources.

The ILO Library offers an information consultancy service and provides access to a multilingual collection of over one million books, reports, journals, legal texts, statistical publications, and electronic information sources on all aspects of the world of work. It produces LABORDOC, a unique database providing worldwide coverage of social and labour affairs, which is available via the Internet, provides information research services, and develops projects and training courses for labour information specialists.

In addition to the ILO Library, the ILO information network includes several specialized information centres in Geneva, three regional documentation centres in Abidjan, Bangkok, and Lima, and other centres in ILO offices worldwide. The statistical, legislative, and other departments also participate in the dissemination of information through the network.



LABORDOC. A unique database on social and labour affairs.



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# ILO Member States

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Albania  
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Antigua and Barbuda  
Argentina  
Armenia  
Australia  
Austria  
Azerbaijan  
  
Bahamas  
Bahrain  
Bangladesh  
Barbados  
Belarus  
Belgium  
Belize  
Benin  
Bolivia  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Botswana  
Brazil  
Bulgaria  
Burkina Faso  
Burundi  
  
Cambodia  
Cameroon  
Canada  
Cape Verde  
Central African Republic  
Chad  
Chile  
China  
Colombia  
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Croatia  
Cuba  
  
Cyprus  
Czech Republic  
  
Democratic Republic of the Congo  
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Ecuador  
Egypt  
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Gambia  
Georgia  
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Guinea-Bissau  
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