

**Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability
and Equal Opportunities in the Postal and
Telecommunications Services**Geneva
13-17 May 2002

**Conclusions on employment, employability and
equal opportunities in the postal and
telecommunications services**

submitted by the Working Party on Conclusions

The Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in
the Postal and Telecommunications Services,

Having met in Geneva from 13 to 17 May 2002,

Adopts this seventeenth day of May 2002 the following conclusions:

General considerations

1. Postal and telecommunications services have experienced rapid change and wide fluctuations in growth, profitability and employment in recent years. They have, in turn, promoted economic growth and stimulated changes in cultural, social and political life around the world. Structural reforms in posts and telecommunications have curtailed public monopolies and led to the appearance and expansion of private operators, and this has increasingly affected employment, working conditions and labour relations. Spectacular technological progress, globalization, changing customer requirements and

significant developments in the regulatory framework at the national, regional and world levels have accompanied those changes.

- 2.** The nature and scope of those changes had profound negative and positive effects on employment, employability and equal opportunities in these industries. As in many other economic sectors, employment creation in some areas has been accompanied by job losses elsewhere, but at a particularly rapid pace in telecommunications. The telecoms boom of the late 1990s gave way to a sharp recession in this sector, as enthusiasm for third-generation telephony and for e-commerce waned while telecommunications firms' debts grew, exacerbated by an economic downturn and events in late 2001. However, new jobs are being created that need to be meaningful and quality jobs, which can be viewed as an opportunity and a challenge for employers' and workers' organizations and governments.
- 3.** These two industries have a fundamental and strategic role in contributing to the economic growth of other sectors and to national and social cohesion. Changes in the economy around the world are directly linked to the development of new postal and telecommunications services, and to the blurring of frontiers between these activities and other sectors such as freight, financial services, and the media sector as a whole. There is strong and continuing commitment to the principle of the universal service in postal services and telecommunications, albeit in various forms, including for example Internet access, at affordable prices, coupled with a need to identify how this can be financed in the longer term, especially as regards remote or rural areas.
- 4.** Regulatory and structural changes have continued in postal and telecommunications services since the 1998 ILO Tripartite Meeting on Postal and Telecommunications Services, including for example the General Agreement on Trade in Services of the WTO and the allocation and pricing of wireless licences. These changes have had a major impact on both industries in many countries. Where monopolies existed, they have, in some cases, gradually been opened up to competition through the liberalization of telecommunications

and, more recently, of postal services. Such changes and, in particular, the full or partial privatization of public operators, have had substantial impact on employment, employability and equal opportunities. Although there is no “one size fits all” approach, the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work provides a good foundation to employment, employability and equal opportunities issues in postal and telecommunications services.

Employment

5. It is difficult to assess whether the creation of employment opportunities in new postal and telecommunications services has compensated for job losses resulting either from technological, structural and regulatory changes or from management policies in enterprises. It is important to consider the quality as well as the quantity of jobs when discussing change in employment levels, and to recall that employment statistics represent real people and their families. The best results in managing the change process are likely to be achieved through appropriate strategic planning and effective social dialogue. Whether contemplating job creation or employment reductions, the social partners and governments should endeavour to respect the principles of fundamental rights at work, social protection, equal treatment and social dialogue.

6. In this period of rapid change, it is difficult to forecast the level of employment, re-emphasizing the need for proper human resource planning and for effective social dialogue. This should take into account the need to provide new services to satisfy consumer demand, thereby creating new job opportunities.

Employability

7. For employers and workers in postal and telecommunications services, these profound changes are having a major impact on training, whether workers stay with their current employer or move to another one. Successful business is dependent upon current skills which are key to employability and better work. Governments, workers and employers and

their organizations recognize that many skills are becoming obsolete. All share the responsibility to develop significant, future-oriented skills. They should cooperate in a positive approach towards training for employability and change. Multiskilling, multitasking and lifelong learning should become the norm in these industries.

- 8.** Lifelong learning should be the key to avoiding skills shortages, improving job quality and satisfaction, enhancing job opportunities, benefiting from technical progress, meeting consumers' requirements and enhancing the quality of service. It requires commitments to ensure adequate funding by employers and governments and commitment by workers to their own skill development, labour-management cooperation, and suitable trainers, facilities and learning materials.
- 9.** Internet access for purposes of training, upskilling and e-learning should be promoted for postal and telecommunications workers, and efforts should be made to bridge the digital divide within the workforce. In addition it is recognized that all parties should make efforts to bridge the digital divide in regions and among groups in society that have insufficient access.
- 10.** Respect for equal opportunities with regard to training is crucial to the success of efforts in employability, employment creation and equal treatment in general.
- 11.** Education is the responsibility of governments, whereas employability training can benefit from inputs from governments, employers and workers' organizations as regards the curriculum and the general orientation of skills development. Universities and schools may not provide all types of skills required by this sector, whereas vocational technical schools are often much more effective in meeting their needs. Greater efforts are needed on the part of governments, academic institutions, employers and workers' organizations to make education and training more relevant and useful in fulfilling the needs of students and potential employers. Constructive dialogue among the social partners on training issues has

been very productive, as illustrated by examples provided in this Meeting and should therefore be encouraged.

12. Governments, educational institutions and the social partners should work towards portability of skills, through recognized skill certification schemes (for example, the IT drivers' licence in Europe) that would allow greater mobility for workers.

Equal opportunities

13. A commitment to equality on the part of workers and employers and their organizations in postal and telecommunications enterprises can assist them to reflect and benefit from diversity in the workforce. ILO instruments on equality should be applied in this sector, in particular the principles of non-discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, age, disability, national extraction or social origin.
14. Progress towards equal opportunities varies widely in these industries in different countries, and it is important to ensure that equal opportunities can open the way towards greater equality of treatment. Education, training, retraining and career development should be open to all workers. Second-chance education could be of special importance to disadvantaged groups.
15. Measures should be implemented to enhance equal opportunities. This would include facilitating opening up career development opportunities, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups. An important objective should be to allow employees to reconcile their work and family responsibilities while continuing to meet business and customer requirements. The social partners should seek to develop these measures through social dialogue processes as appropriate. Opportunities for part-time, short-term and other flexible working arrangements can provide access for those trying to enter or re-enter the workforce. Access to longer term or full-time employment by those wanting to progress should also be encouraged.

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- 16.** Governments and the social partners should promote and observe the ILO concept of decent work, the principles and rights in the Conventions referred to in the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, and those enshrined in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up, as instruments to ensure equality of opportunities.
- 17.** The achievement of equal opportunities is a goal for which we should strive constantly. Its pursuit has represented a major cultural and attitudinal change at the workplace. Progress has been made on equal opportunities in the postal and telecommunications sectors but there is still a need for greater equality of opportunity in career advancement and equality of treatment in pay and benefit structures.

Social dialogue

- 18.** Good labour relations are essential in the postal and telecommunications sector. Workers should have the right to organize collectively and to be represented by free and independent workers' organizations in accordance with international labour standards concerning freedom of association and the right to organize and collective bargaining.
- 19.** Many examples of effective social dialogue in postal and telecommunications services have been identified during the Meeting, from various parts of the world. The experience is more meaningful and mutually beneficial when it is genuine, transparent and freely entered into, and based on openness and sharing of information. European works councils exist in several postal and telecommunications enterprises. Global framework agreements have already been concluded by Telefónica (Spain) and OTE (Greece) with workers' organizations on labour and employment issues, taking into account international labour standards. Such arrangements can facilitate efforts by the social partners to work together in the process of sectoral change, and to find solutions to shared problems.

20. In accordance with national law and practice, workers and their representatives in postal and telecommunications enterprises should be consulted on a timely basis on human resources implications of the strategic decisions of operators. Wherever possible, they should be involved at all appropriate levels of the restructuring process if the reforms are to fully achieve their objectives of efficient and quality service. The process of restructuring should not undermine existing collective bargaining.

21. Social dialogue should include the regulators of postal and telecommunications services.

Role of the ILO

22. The ILO has an important role in promoting good labour relations and decent work in this sector, in conjunction with other international agencies. The ILO should study and disseminate to member States best practices in employment, employability and equal opportunities in this sector.

23. Several ILO instruments are particularly relevant to employment, equal opportunities, employability and the new structural and regulatory developments in postal and telecommunications services. An important aspect of the ILO's work is to promote the application of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up.

24. The ILO should organize or support, at the regional or subregional levels, tripartite seminars or workshops in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean with the participation of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the World Bank to consider structural and regulatory changes in the postal and telecommunications services of the regions or subregions concerned and to propose measures in the light of ILO standards, including measures to improve labour relations.