

## **Making Decent Work a Global Goal**

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda calls for a development strategy that acknowledges the central role of work in people's lives. Full and productive employment and decent workforce all have acquired a central place in international and national policy making. They are recognised as indispensable for economic growth, social cohesion and poverty eradication and are thus an essential element of sustainable development.

Here are some FAQs on Decent Work.

### *Overall message:*

"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 dignity."  
– Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, 87th International Labour Conference, 1999

### **What is Decent Work?**

Decent Work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

### **What is a Decent Work deficit?**

People throughout the world face deficits, gaps and exclusions in the form of unemployment and underemployment, poor-quality and unproductive jobs, unsafe work and insecure income, rights which are denied, gender inequality, migrant workers who are exploited, lack of representation and voice, and inadequate protection in the face of disease, disability and old age. ILO programmes aim to find solutions to these problems.

### **What are some examples of Decent Work deficits?**

Nearly 200 million people are unemployed – more than ever before. Half the world's workers live on less than US\$2 a day. Of these unemployed, the ILO estimates that 86 million, or about half the global total, are young people aged 15 to 24. One out of every seven children in the world today is still involved in child labour of some kind. Accidents and diseases at work cause 2 million fatalities a year, an average of 6,000 per day. These are just a few examples.

### **What are the risks of a "Decent Work deficit"?**

The global jobs crisis is one of the biggest security risks we face today. If we choose to continue along the present path, the world risks becoming more fragmented, protectionist and confrontational. A continued lack of Decent Work opportunities, insufficient investments and under consumption lead to an erosion of the basic social contract underlying democratic societies: that all must share in progress.

**What if these risks are ignored?**

Experience from many countries suggests that the risks of disorder are higher where the need for Decent Work opportunities is ignored. And recovery from crisis is faster where communities can come together to work for reconstruction. Decent work is an important part of the global peace-building agenda.

**How can we achieve the goal of Decent Work?**

Through the engagement and commitment of its tripartite constituents, the ILO plays a major role in facilitating the integration of the Decent Work Agenda into strategies for poverty reduction and a fair and inclusive globalisation.

**What are the ILO's four strategic objectives, and how do they relate to Decent Work?**

Decent work calls for the integration of economic and social objectives and for a well-orchestrated combination of measures converging toward four strategic objectives, namely rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. This coherent approach is proving its relevance to a wide-ranging policy agenda, from social dimensions of globalisation to poverty reduction strategies.

**How do employers and economies benefit from Decent Work?**

Growth, investment and enterprise development are obviously necessary. Promoting a conducive and competitive environment for private initiative, in the wide arc of entrepreneurship that covers helping people organise to move progressively out of the informal economy to the best way of combining national interests with foreign investments, is key to the future of work.

**How does the Decent Work Agenda translate into practical action at the national level?**

Integrated Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), developed by ILO constituents, define the priorities and the targets within national development frameworks. ILO assistance to member states in achieving Decent Work objectives is to be prepared and implemented within the DWCPs, which are time-bound and resourced programmes and vary in focus from country to country, reflecting different national needs, resources, priorities and conditions.

**What is the difference between a DWCP and a Pilot Programme?**

While assisting the participating countries, the Decent Work Pilot Programme also supports other national Decent Work initiatives through exchange of experiences and knowledge among countries, the development and provision of tools and methods, as well as advisory services. The Decent Work Pilot Programme was initiated in October 2000 to pioneer ways in which the concept of Decent Work can be effectively promoted and applied in ILO member countries. The lessons of the pilot programme countries are now being used to introduce Decent Work Country Programmes in many other ILO member States.

**Is the Decent Work Agenda advancing?**

Yes. In a relatively short time period, Decent Work has gained international support and spawned a consensus that productive employment and Decent Work are key elements to achieving poverty reduction. At the UN World Summit in September of 2005, for example, 150 global leaders agreed to place full and productive employment and decent work as a central objective of relevant national and international policies and spelled out the central role of Decent Work in development strategies and poverty reduction. The High Level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) meeting in Geneva in 2006 issued a Ministerial Declaration recognising that the Decent Work Agenda is an important instrument for achieving the objective of full and productive employment and decent work for all and resolved to make that objective central to their relevant national and international policies and national development strategies, as part of their efforts to achieve the internationally agreed development goals including poverty eradication and other key development objectives. Affirmative statements on the Decent Work Agenda have also been made by the African Union (AU) heads of state and government, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Organisation of American States

(OAS) presidential summit and tripartite social partners in Latin America, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the European Commission (EC) and the G8 Heads of State Summit in 2007.

**What about other international organisations?**

The ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration also requested the whole multilateral system, including funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, and invited international financial institutions and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to support efforts to mainstream the goals of full and productive employment and Decent Work for all in their policies, programmes and activities.

**How does Decent Work relate to the MDGs?**

There is general agreement that Decent Work will help to achieve the central Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty for 2015. Full and productive employment and Decent Work is now a target under Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

**What is the new Decent Work “toolkit”?**

The “Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work” is designed to mobilise synergies and enhance the employment and decent work impact of the CEB member agencies as a contribution towards a system-wide coherent approach to the implementation of the 2005 World Summit Outcome. It is part of the effort to reform the UN and realise the goal of “One United Nations” by sharing knowledge efficiently and systematically, identifying policy synergies, avoiding overlaps, promoting policy dialogue and focusing interagency cooperation around a shared international development agenda. Moreover, it will serve as a practical example of how a global issue can be worked into the country-level agenda.