

Social Protection: A central component of Decent Work

Vision: Social protection for all

Social protection is one of the four pillars of ILO Decent Work Agenda. Social protection for the vulnerable and needy is key in reducing poverty. Since only around 10 per cent of Africa's labour force, principally those in the formal economy, are covered by statutory social protection, the enhancement of the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all is one of the key strategic objectives of the ILO-SRO Addis Ababa and a main priority component of the Ouagadougou Plan of Action¹ for promotion of employment and poverty alleviation.

Within the region, majority of men and women work in poor and hazardous conditions. Based on available data from various sources, the ILO estimates² that every year, more than 2 million people die of work-related accidents and diseases while the overall annual number of occupational accidents is estimated at 270 million. In addition, more than 160 million workers fall ill each year as a result of workplace hazards. While annual rates of such injuries and diseases are declining slowly in most industrialized countries, they are on the increase in developing countries, where small enterprises and the informal economy account for over 90 per cent of workplaces. Working conditions in such workplaces are often very poor and most informal economy workers do not have any form of labour protection. This presents a major challenge or ILO's work in Africa.

SRO national social protection strategies in the framework of DWCPs include interlinked plans for social security, labour protection, HIV-AIDS at the workplace and migration issues. Under this joint sectoral/regional strategy is to improve and extend social security schemes and to contribute to the Global Campaign³ to extend social security coverage. In the area of occupational safety and health all activities are guided by the Global Strategy adopted in 2003 and Convention No.187⁴, which promotes a systems approach and continuous improvement of national occupational safety and health performance as a collaborative effort of the government, employers and workers particularly through the formulation and implementation of national occupational safety and health programmes. The *ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work*⁵ remains the framework for activities concerning HIV/AIDS at all levels. Work in the area of migration is guided by the Plan of Action for Migrant

¹ See also the Ouagadougou Plan of Action from :

http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/addisababa/pdf/planofaction_en.pdf

²More information is available from SAFEWORK Website :

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/>

³ More information is available from Global campaign (HQ Web):

http://www.ilo.org/global/Themes/Social_Security/lang--en/index.htm

⁴See also convention 187 and its Recommendation 197 (HQ Web):

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/standard.htm>, [Recommendation 197](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/standard.htm)

⁵More information is available from ILOAIDS website

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/publ/code.htm>

Workers contained in the resolution on “A Fair Deal for Migrant Workers in the Global Economy” adopted by consensus by the 92nd session of the ILC in 2004.

The 11th ILO African Regional Meeting⁶ (Addis Ababa, April 2007) agreed on the following targets related to social protection:

- *All African countries adopt coherent national social security strategies, including for the introduction or extension of a basic social security package that includes essential health care, maternity protection, child support for school-age children, disability protection and a minimum pension.*
- *All countries in Africa have national HIV/AIDS strategies to ensure that the Workplace contributes to the overall objective of achieving universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support.*
- *Three-quarters of all African member States develop programmes for the improvement of working conditions, with specific national targets for reducing non-compliance with laws concerning hours of work and minimum pay, the reduction of occupational accidents, diseases and days lost to illness and accidents per worker, and a progressive increase in the number of labour inspectors in relation to workers.*
- *Three-quarters of all African States have policies to ensure that migrant workers have regular, authorized status and are fully protected by the labour legislation of the host country and granted equal treatment and opportunities by 2015.*
- *Three-quarters of all African States adopt strategies to formalize the informal economy and extend protection to informal economy workers. Such strategies should integrate, among other things, policies for the increased registration of informal businesses, skills development, improved and safer working conditions, the extension of social protection coverage and the encouragement of freely chosen associations of informal economy workers and employers.*

To achieve these ambitious targets, Africa needs to sensitize both the populations at large as well as policy makers at the highest levels through an energetic campaigns such as the annual World Day for Safety and Health at Work⁷. Such a campaign can only take place within the context of the formulation and implementation of coherent national occupational safety and health (OSH) policy and programmes based on a systems approach as outlined in the ILO Global Strategy on OSH⁸ and mainstreamed in the decent work country programmes. The Strategy provides the basis for ILO

⁶ More information is available form:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/afpro/addisababa/arm/index.htm>

⁷ See also Safe Work home page:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/worldday/index.htm>

⁸ More information is available from: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/>

action in the area of occupational safety and health, which includes the building and the maintenance of a national preventive safety and health culture based on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No.187), and the application of a systems approach to occupational safety and health management. A model for a management systems approach at the enterprise level has been developed in the ILO *Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems 2001*.

In light of massive presence of medium and small enterprises in the region, voluntary and participatory efforts at the workplace level are essential. The Work Improvement in Small Enterprises (WISE)⁹ methodology and the Work Improvement for Neighbourhood Development (WIND)¹⁰ provide tools to promote self-improvement efforts in occupational safety and health, working conditions and productivity in small enterprises that are hard to reach through traditional approaches, which rely mostly on government inspection and trade union efforts. While the implementation of these participatory approaches has had a significant impact in some countries, efforts are being made to adapt, upgrade and expand the original training packages to respond to a developing demand in Africa.

Confronting the main challenges for social protection as part of a decent work strategy for Africa requires major efforts in enhancing social protection coverage and quality, notably for people working in the informal economy and their dependents, people living in families that are affected by HIV/AIDS and migrant workers. Long-term social protection policies need to be designed and adopted within the framework of broad national tripartite dialogue. Social protection consists of rights- and rules-based transfers, dealing with a full range of social risks and needs in lives and at the work place that make people socially more secure.

Increased urbanization, migration, new safety and health hazards and other social changes are steadily leading to a breakdown in the extended family systems and classical labour relations that for many provided the main form of social security and labour protection. It is estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa only about 10 per cent of the economically active population enjoys statutory social protection, mostly in the form of old-age pension schemes and in some cases through health-care schemes. Rather than increasing, coverage of statutory schemes is declining in most countries. Public health services reach a higher percentage of the population in some countries but only with a very limited range of medical care benefits.

Working conditions and occupational safety and health are essential elements of decent work. Their importance has been increasingly echoed in regional and national policies in Africa. The need to ensure decent working conditions has gained further importance in the context of efforts to make globalization more beneficial and fair to

⁹ See also the TRAVAIL website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/index.htm>

¹⁰ See also the TRAVAIL website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/index.htm>

workers. It is now widely recognized that globalization¹¹ and other accompanying policy changes should be structured to ensure safe and healthy workplaces, better wages and decent working hours as well as to reduce difficulties in balancing work and non-work life (especially family). In Sub-Saharan Africa the estimated fatal occupational accident rate in 2001 was 190.5 per million, extremely high compared to industrialized countries. The prevention of occupational accidents and occupational diseases is therefore essential to realize decent work in Africa.

Low wages characterize many African countries in the region, leading to high numbers of “working poor”. These countries are also facing increased wage differentials. Many governments are currently involved in reforms of pay systems in the public sector as part of attempts to reform public administration. At the same time social dialogue and collective bargaining on wages are poorly developed and require particular attention. More modern and motivating pay systems also need to be developed to better link wages to individual and enterprise performance. A more comprehensive wage policy¹² is thus needed in most African countries, in a context of difficult economic growth especially in the current global economic crisis, a significant share of the informal economy and persistently high poverty rates.

Working time policies¹³ and strategies need to take into account fundamental differences between the formal and informal economies. In the formal economy, the most significant issue is (as in most of the developing world) the high proportions of workers who are working excessively long working hours (over 48 a week). In the informal economy, by contrast, the reality is that working hours are much more diverse than they are in the formal economy. The data that is available, which focuses on informal self-employment, shows substantial portions of workers, particularly men, devoting long hours to paid work, and also substantial portions of men, and particularly, women working shorter hours for pay (less than 35 per week), but devoting many hours to unpaid work, as well as considerable variability in the number of hours worked in any given week.

In order to improve working conditions effectively in the sub-region, ILO-SRO provides technical assistance in developing practical programmes, based on the solid evaluations of and social dialogue on the impacts of the current regulations of working conditions. More specifically, it supports efforts to:-

- Improve the knowledge base on wages and pay systems with a view to encouraging tripartite dialogue on wages issues and developing better wage policies including minimum wages. In doing so, collective bargaining on wages should be strengthened;

¹¹ More information is available from :

http://www.ilo.org/global/What_we_do/Publications/Officialdocuments/lang--en/docName--WCMS_099766/index.htm

¹² See also the TRAVAIL website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/index.htm>

¹³ See also the TRAVAIL website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/index.htm>

- To make working time laws more effective, strengthen the staffing and skills of the labour inspectorates. Improved enforcement of working time laws should be combined with enterprise-level policies (and sectoral-level policies, where appropriate) to assist enterprises to improve their hourly productivity and overall competitiveness. Technical assistance is also provided to develop flexible working time arrangements that can balance workers' needs with enterprises' business requirements;
- Review and adjust policy frameworks for a coherent approach to creating effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers, including work-family reconciliation policies and measures as well as measures that safeguard the health and employment rights of women during pregnancy and maternity, through elimination of maternity as a source of discrimination, employment security and safe working conditions throughout pregnancy; the right to maternity leave and benefits, and the right to breastfeed upon return to work;

The ILO-SRO continues to intensify its promotional work to encourage companies to adopt a win-win strategy where the improvement of working conditions pays off. In addition, in the light of the significance of rural employment in the sub-region, a sectoral approach is also to be promoted. For this the WISE material is adapted to various countries or sectors according to their specificities. The WIND methodology, which is targeted at households and children living on farms and exposed to hazards in agriculture, is being adapted to increase its applicability in the region and is being promoted as the basis for designing interventions for better and more productive work in the rural informal economy

Poverty and gender inequality in the sub-region and Africa in general cannot be overcome without concentrated attention to and support for workers' unpaid domestic and care responsibilities, particularly in the case of women workers. Poverty reduction most certainly requires policies that stimulate economic growth and generate opportunities for men and women to obtain decent jobs. However, such policies can only be effective if they explicitly take into account workers' needs for support for their unpaid domestic and care responsibilities. Workers with family responsibilities find that long working hours, lack of leave policies, excessive commutes, the lack of child care facilities, inhospitable hours for government services and schools, shrinking public services and increasing care demands associated with HIV/AIDS make for great difficulties in combining paid economic activities with unpaid domestic and care responsibilities.

In the area of labour migration, this takes place within sub-regions, between sub-regions as well as towards Europe and the Gulf. Flows are a mixture of regular and irregular flows and stocks. Unmanaged labour migration can be to the detriment of interest of both countries of origin and destination. Most importantly, it will also result in deficits in the protection of migrant workers.

ILO action in the sub-region aims at ensuring the protection of migrant workers and the efficient functioning of labour markets in countries of origin and destination. In doing so, it will be guided by the Plan of Action for Migrant Workers contained in

the resolution on “A Fair Deal for Migrant Workers in the Global Economy”¹⁴ adopted by consensus by the 92nd session of the ILC in 2004. The issues specific to women migrant workers will receive particular attention.

The ILO-SRO in collaboration with headquarter technical departments also supports the Regional Economic Communities (RECs such as the East Africa Community (EAC)) through facilitating the mobility of migrant workers between countries. This assures that mobility regimes be developed and effectively put in practice. In turn, these goals presuppose measures that ensure that labour mobility is beneficial to all parties and does not result in unnecessary disruptions. They also require measures in such areas as skill recognition, remittances, social security and occupational safety and health are addressed and policies are harmonised within the RECs.

In the area of HIV/AIDS, the DWCPs now offer the opportunity strengthen not only the HIV responses first and foremost within social protection interventions, but also in relation to the protection of rights, the promotion of skills and employment opportunities, and the strengthening of social dialogue.

The current strategy pivots on the inclusion of HIV/AIDS in occupational safety and health structures, in labour legislation and administration, in gender promotion, in entrepreneurship and in vocational training programmes, as well as support for the development of innovative health and life insurance schemes, are just some examples of an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS in and beyond the workplace.

The ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work provides international guidelines for policy-making and concrete workplace responses. It establishes both the rights and the responsibilities of the tripartite partners, along with key principles of workplace policy. It covers the following key areas: prevention through education, occupational safety and health, gender-awareness programmes and practical support for behavior change; protection of workers’ rights, including employment protection, gender equality, entitlement to benefits and non-discrimination; care and support, including confidential voluntary counselling and testing, as well as treatment in settings where local health systems are inadequate.

Policies to implement the provisions of the Code of Practice pay particular attention to anti-discrimination measures, workers’ rights, gender equality, safe working conditions, social protection and elimination of child labour. The rights-based approach of the ILO in contributing to global efforts to combat HIV/AIDS is applied to the development of policies at all levels – national, sectoral and workplace and the SRO is actively providing technical assistance to promote its implementation.

In summary, the ILO-SRO responds to these social protection needs in the Sub-region in a coherent fashion with central focus on ensuring that more people have access to better managed social security benefits, safety health and working conditions in workplaces are improved; labour migration is managed to foster protection and decent employment of migrant workers, workplace policies respond to needs for HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support.

¹⁴More information on ‘A Fair Deal for Migrant Workers in the Global Economy’, is available from: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/index.htm>

Since the ILO-SRO cannot achieve this alone, it collaborates and builds partnerships with UN agencies and other institutions, particularly within the framework of “One UN” and within the sub/regional and regional levels in meeting these challenges.