

INTRODUCTION

The overarching ILO objective of promoting decent work for women and men everywhere requires the linking of labour market and employment policies with social protection systems based on equality for all vulnerable groups.¹ This issue of the *Review* focuses on this linkage addressing the vulnerability of different categories of workers. In essence, all the articles in this issue stress the need for a shift away from conventional and passive policy approaches to innovative and proactive ones. For instance, new policy strategies are identified for the effective redeployment of workers dismissed on economic grounds — who are vulnerable because of their adverse occupational, age and skills profiles — and for the labour market reintegration of the long-term unemployed — another vulnerable group — through employment-subsidy schemes combined with training and job counselling assistance in a range of industrialized countries. Retirees in central and eastern Europe represent another category of vulnerable workers, and the radical pension reforms examined in this issue have inevitably affected them.

The broader framework of a *decent work* approach is innovatively used in the opening article to analyse the issue of equality and empowerment of disadvantaged groups. The focus of the *perspective* in this issue — inter alia on men and masculinities and on feminist critiques of equality — should enliven the debate on gender issues.

In their survey of redundancy procedures and outcomes in France, Germany, Italy and Spain, *Marie-Laure Morin* and *Christine Vicens* document a policy shift from the concept of job security to that of working life security. The evidence shows how active labour market policies — e.g. retraining agreements, transitional employment contracts, registration of redundant workers under “labour market lists”, and measures targeting vulnerable groups — are gaining ground over traditional, passive measures seeking to guarantee income and maintain social protection, such as unemployment compensation schemes, measures permitting early exit from the labour market, disability pensions, and statutory or negotiated severance pay.

¹ For an elaboration of the concept of decent work see ILO: *Decent work*, Report of the Director-General to the International Labour Conference, 87th Session, Geneva, 1999.

The authors critically review the role and effectiveness of the key actors in preventing and planning dismissals and in enhancing the employability and redeployment of the workers affected. They conclude with suggestions for improving institutional and legal mechanisms for fostering and facilitating social dialogue through country-specific measures.

In their article concerning workers reaching normal retirement age, *Elaine Fultz* and *Markus Ruck* first outline the context of pension reform in central and eastern Europe (CEE). The reform has led to a shift away from universal redistributive policies towards systems in which benefits are more individualized and earnings-related with, in some cases, increasing reliance on the private sector for pension provision. Inevitably, therefore, the result has been growing differentiation in the extent of social protection provided. The restructuring of public schemes has consisted in raising national retirement ages, reducing redistribution and wage replacement ratios in benefit formulas, curtailing benefits to privileged categories of workers or providing separate sources of financing for them, and strengthening procedures for collecting contributions.

Their article shows that experience so far provides little confirmation of the suitability of radical pension reforms to the evolving political and socio-economic environments of the CEE countries, and that the focus of these reforms has been relatively narrow, ignoring the needs of disadvantaged groups.

After articles addressing worker redundancy and pension reform issues, the following one dwells on incentive structures for the protection and creation of jobs for vulnerable groups. Drawing on evidence mostly from Belgium and the Netherlands but also from other European countries, the United States and Australia, *Ive Marx* identifies the major reasons for the inadequacy of employment subsidies and cuts in employers' social security contributions as means of improving the labour market prospects of the long-term unemployed and other vulnerable groups.

Two major findings emerge from his review of the empirical evaluation literature. First, the measured net employment effects are consistently much lower than the predictions of most theoretical models and simulations, even under relatively pessimistic assumptions. And second, there is a paucity of evidence that targeted subsidies have a beneficial effect on the later careers of recipients — some studies even found a negative impact on future employment prospects. He concludes that, whether measures are of a general nature or targeted on specific groups, it is advisable to link subsidies with training and job counselling.

The first article and the *perspective* together address the important subject of equality. The opening article, contributed by *Bob Hepple*, seeks to clarify the notion of equality, in view of the bewildering range of concepts of equality embodied in international instruments such as the ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), the anti-discrimination directives of the European Union and its Charter of Funda-

mental Rights. Hepple identifies two basic dimensions of equality: equality as consistency or formal equality, and substantive or material equality. The former embodies the notion of procedural justice with no guarantee of any particular outcome. The latter consists of three different but overlapping approaches, namely, equality of results, equality of opportunity, and equality of human dignity. All three approaches, he argues, lie at the heart of the notion of *decent work*, which proclaims equality among all those who work or seek work, irrespective of their age, sex and status in employment. The growing recognition that inequalities cause poverty, contribute to failed development, conflict with fundamental rights and breed internal conflict provides support for the view that the idea of *decent work* embodying these approaches to equality can serve as a model of socially sustainable development.

The author illustrates how legal effect can be given to social rights and advocates an inclusive, proactive approach to promoting equality by making organizations responsible for reaching goals and targets to improve diversity in the workforce, rather than a passive approach of defensive response to complaints of discrimination. The proposed approach to enforcement is incremental, beginning with reliance on voluntary initiative and ending — if necessary — with penalties for non-compliance, but only as a last resort. The underlying assumption is that “private forms of social control are often more important in changing behaviour than state law enforcement”. This approach, however, depends crucially on the active participation of *all* stakeholders and, therefore, on the empowerment of the disadvantaged groups themselves. To operationalize the concept of *decent work*, the author argues, the ILO’s existing legal framework for equality may require some adjustment accordingly.

This issue concludes with the second instalment of a contribution by *Mark Lansky* — “Gender, women and all the rest”,² which is closely linked to Hepple’s broader treatment of the issue of equality. His *perspective* opens with a review of some of the recent research, undertaken within the framework of gender and development, on the subject of “men and masculinities”. This research and the ideas it is generating are still controversial, particularly where they are perceived to pose a threat to the traditional “women’s agenda” in development policy. Yet they are clearly an important contribution to broadening the development policy outlook on equality. Conceptually, the focus is shifting to a fuller understanding of gender as an integral component of the societies in which both women and men live and cooperate. Not only does this understanding bring out the weaknesses of concepts based on a straightforward opposition between men and women and on domination by men, it also highlights the need to perceive inequalities between women and men within a broader context of social justice failures that determine the specific socio-economic circumstances within which gender is enacted.

² Part I was published in Vol. 139 (2000), No. 4, pp. 481-504 of the *International Labour Review*.

Such thinking is also supported by concurrent critiques of the concept of equality and a reconsideration of the legal frameworks within which equality — as a social objective — has so far been pursued. The *perspective* reviews these and other important insights and concerns recently expressed both in the academic literature and in the work of development institutions. The general picture suggests an emerging consensus on the need for a new policy framework for pursuing equality — one more humanly responsive to the real lives that women and men lead.

In the *Books* section, readers will find a review of a book on the transformation of labour relations in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia following transition from a state-controlled to a market economy. A particular feature is the author's concern to take proper account of the full legacy of the past, not just of the communist era, when examining the experience of transition.

Recent books reports on a variety of recent publications, most of them relevant to the articles featured. Three are concerned with equality issues (a compilation of readings on the relevance of gender in a wide range of subjects from the social and biological sciences; the “male experience” as lived in American society and the masculinity issues this raises; and social protection provision for women in Spain). Another examines the role of education and underutilization of skills in cases where jobs traditionally held by lower-skilled workers are occupied by more highly educated workers. The implications of the pervasive non-payment of wages to workers in the Russian Federation following the shift from planned economy to market economy is the subject of another book featured. Finally, there are reviews of a collection of essays on full employment in tribute to William S. Vickrey, the 1996 winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, and of a source book on research on workplace flexibility.

New ILO publications includes three Reports prepared for the International Labour Conference, 89th Session, 2001: that of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, one on the promotion of cooperatives, and another on issues, challenges and prospects of social security. Other ILO publications concern human resources development; employment and globalization in hotel, catering and tourism; the impact of reforms in health and education in Latin America and the Caribbean; safety in the use of synthetic vitreous fibre insulation wools; the employment impact of mergers and acquisitions in the banking and financial services sector; the public employment service in a changing labour market; the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy; women, gender and equality; and a global perspective on youth unemployment and employment policy.