

THE ILO LIBRARY

Essentially, the ILO Library acts as an information broker by connecting information users, both inside and outside the ILO, to knowledge on the world of work. It does this by bringing new knowledge into the ILO, and sending out (ILO and non-ILO) knowledge to ILO officials, ILO constituents, partner organizations and the wider public.

To do these tasks efficiently and cost effectively, information has to be organized and managed – otherwise information gets lost, or the maximum value cannot be extracted from it. The ILO Library and the ILO database Labordoc are key institutional resources which centralize and therefore facilitate access to knowledge resources.

Supporting ILO research and strengthening ILO technical capacity

Good policies and good advice are based on good research – and good research is built on a solid basis of credible, relevant and up-to-date information and on being able to identify where knowledge gaps exist. There is little point in calling for better research if researchers are not given the appropriate tools to do better research.

Of course researchers need to know what the ILO has done, but it is a mistake to think that the ILO needs to draw only on its own work and experience to produce good policies. The ILO also needs new ideas from the outside and it needs to know what its partner institutions are doing and thinking. If the ILO relies only on what it produces, it will only be able to answer questions that have already been asked. How would it answer new questions?

Worldwide, Labordoc is the only database that covers comprehensively work and work-related issues, it is the only database that covers extensively socio-economic development materials published by developing countries, it is the only database that covers extensively socio-economic development information in English, French and Spanish, and it is one of the four databases which cover in any depth socio-economic information about the developing world.

Sharing knowledge with external users of ILO information

It is important for the ILO to contribute high quality knowledge resources to academic and research institutions and to partner institutions. Ease of access governs what information users will look for and use. Information resources need to be organized so that access to them is as easy as possible. The ILO Library and Labordoc are excellent vehicles to promote ILO publications and Labordoc is used in such networks as the Resource Discovery Network which serves the higher education and research community in the UK, the Swiss Education and Research Network, the World Bank, and why various universities around the world have direct links to Labordoc.

Institutional memory

The ILO Library makes ILO information publicly accessible in a systematic way, and over the long term. Technical departments are restructured, work programmes and, sometimes priorities, are changed, but the ILO Library has existed since 1919. It is a reliable and stable central access point in the ILO for all ILO publications (print or electronic) – and to which ILO officials, ILO constituents, researchers and the wider public have easy access.

The added value provided by the ILO Library as a protector of the institutional memory is that it is the only ILO programme which analyses the subject content of what the Office publishes. Labordoc, the ILO's bibliographic database which is produced by the ILO Library, is the only place where you can learn easily and quickly what the Office has published on, for example, the informal economy 20 odd years ago when the ILO established the concept, and how it has developed this concept since then.

Old wine in new bottles

The basic function of research libraries, such as the ILO Library, has not changed – but how we do what we do has changed enormously and continues to change. This is not just a simple question of using IT as much as possible; it also means taking account of how IT and especially the Internet is changing how people interact, and how they seek out and use information. That means librarians in their role of knowledge broker have to improve the information literacy of the researchers and to design information products to help researchers find the information they need.

New projects/products are now being developed to do this (while adding more value and reducing costs). For example, digitizing ILO publications, publishing web-based resource guides, providing in-depth research assistance to departments, and using Labordoc as a central information resource tool.