



8th European Regional Meeting

FACTS ON *fundamental rights at work*



International
Labour
Organization

Europe and Central Asia is the region with the highest ratification rate of the ILO's eight fundamental Conventions linked to the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Only three ratifications from Central Asian countries are missing. This high level of commitment to fundamental principles and rights at work offers a firm basis for the implementation of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

However, problems of implementation remain in all parts of the region. Even where the legal commitment to rights at work is strong, there is an abiding need to ensure that the relevant national institutions, namely labour administrations and freely constituted and functioning employers' and workers' organizations, are equal to their tasks.

Key institutions in the region have played an important role in strengthening fundamental labour rights, most notably the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The EU Generalized System of Preferences (GSP and GSP+ for vulnerable economies requesting inclusion in the scheme), through which the EU grants non-reciprocal preferential access to the EU market, is also relevant to the strengthening of compliance with fundamental labour rights. Ratification of and compliance with fundamental ILO Conventions is a criterion for receiving GSP+ preferential trade access.

The renewed European Social Agenda of 2 July 2008 underlines that the European Commission is committed to ensuring that there is no contradiction between economic freedoms and the protection of fundamental rights. The European Parliament recently adopted a report on challenges to collective agreements in the EU which considers that the exercise of fundamental rights, as recognized in ILO Conventions, should not be put at risk

FACTS

- Europe and Central Asia can be satisfied with the almost universal ratification of Conventions Nos 87 and 98.
- Although the ILO's latest child labour estimates show a decline in the number of children working in the region, child labour is still endemic in certain areas. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, many street children fall victim to the worst forms of child labour and rural children perform hazardous work in agriculture.
- According to ILO estimates, there are at least 570,000 victims of forced labour in industrialized and transition countries at any given point in time, of whom 470,000 have been trafficked. Most forced labour in Europe and the CIS is the outcome of largely irregular migration processes.
- One of the most pressing political, social and human rights issues facing the region is the poor treatment and often extreme poverty of the Roma, the largest ethnic minority group in Europe and Central Asia, who number around 10 million. Unemployment among Roma people, and especially Roma women, in South Eastern Europe ranges between 50 and 90 per cent.
- Discrimination based on disability is a serious issue in employment. In Western Europe, a person aged between 16 and 64 who has a mild disability has a 66 per cent chance of finding a job; this rate falls to 47 per cent for a moderately disabled person and 25 per cent for a person with a severe disability.

The role of the ILO

Further to the ILO's campaign for the universal ratification of the fundamental Conventions, 49 ILO Member States in the region have ratified all of these Conventions, compared with 42 at the time of the last European Regional Meeting in 2005. What's more, the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has been able to note, in 71 cases between 2005 and 2007, the progress made by countries in the region in giving better effect to ratified Conventions.

The ILO's technical assistance and cooperation in this area was mainly carried out through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), its Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL) as well as projects and activities directly focused on discrimination, and promoting freedom of association and effective social dialogue.

Key ILO standards relating to fundamental rights at work

The ILO's constituents, governments, employers' and workers' organizations worldwide, have identified eight conventions as "fundamental", covering subjects that are considered as fundamental principles and rights at work: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

The eight fundamental conventions are:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

These principles are also covered in the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998). In 1995, the ILO launched a campaign to achieve universal ratification of these eight conventions.

For more information, please read:

1. «Report of the Director-General to the 8th European Regional Meeting: Delivering decent work in Europe and Central Asia»
 - Volume I, Part 1, ISBN 978-92-2-121867-8
 - Volume I, Part 2, ISBN 978-92-2-121869-2
2. «Policy responses to the economic crisis: A decent work approach in Europe and Central Asia».
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International Labour Office
4 route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Tel. +4122/799-7912
Fax +4122/799-8577

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