

ILO Workers' Group Priorities

2008-2011 Governing Body

1. The following Workers' Group Priorities have been developed on the basis of a proposal by the Chair of the ILO Workers' Group and further to consultations with members of the Workers' Group, its Secretariat and the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV).
2. The programme which the Workers' Group wishes to see the ILO pursue is significantly being influenced by the worsened financial and economic difficulties which have now assumed crisis proportions and are affecting the lives and livelihoods of working men and women as well as those who cannot find work.
3. The Workers' Group needs to make it clear that it cannot support recovery measures which are geared at making workers undertake the unilateral responsibility for a global collapse which was not of their making. It is not prepared therefore to join in any reactionary programmes intended to restore countries and businesses to their pre-crisis levels. The contrary will be our purpose. The response to the crisis should contain practical suggestions regarding how to prevent the further degradation of the working class, particularly the most vulnerable. It must not reduce but enhance these persons' capacity to provide their basic needs including medical care and retirement benefits as minimal standards; it must provide for the enhancement of workers' capacity to treat with the restructuring that will result from national and global recovery efforts; it must provide for adequate safeguards mechanisms including those involving workers as key stakeholders; and it should be geared towards establishing a greater GDP share for workers than what was obtained immediately before the crisis.
4. The ILO therefore needs to play a central role in the responses to the economic and social crisis to ensure that the labour and social dimensions of the crisis are fully taken into account.
5. Our position will be greatly enhanced by the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (SJD) which provides relevant guidance to orient ILO future work including ILO response to the global economic and social crisis. ILO work needs to be re-prioritized and new initiatives taken. The Workers' Group therefore commits to the following.

International Labour Standards

6. The Workers' Group is committed to give effect to the SJD call of promoting the ILO standard-setting policy as a corner-stone of ILO activities. In so doing the following priorities have been identified.
7. Building upon the SJD call to member states to review their situation as regards the ratification and implementation of ILO instruments, the Workers' Group will seek to enhance Office work in promoting the ratification and implementation of the up-to-date Conventions and Recommendations.

In this regard, four packages of standards deserve particular attention:

- 1) the core labour standards with a focus on freedom of association and collective bargaining targeting in particular those large countries having not yet ratified these two conventions
- 2) the governance standards (C. 122 on employment policy, C. 144 on tripartite consultations, C. 81 and C. 129 on labour inspection),
- 3) the gender standards (C. 183 on maternity protection, C. 156 on workers with family responsibilities) as well as C. 175 on part-time work and C. 177 on home work
- 4) the package of standards relevant in the context of the crisis

For a complete list of these standards please see Annex.

8. Increasing the ratification rate of up-to-date Conventions including the governance standards and other Conventions also requires mobilization at national level. The Workers' Group hence commits to promote the ratification of these standards in their own countries including by the use of the mechanisms set forth in Convention 144 for those countries having ratified it.¹ The success of ratification campaigns will also require the involvement of the international trade union movement.
9. Preserving the standard-setting function of the ILO also requires the development of new standards. The International Labour Conference should be adopting new instruments on HIV/AIDS (in 2010) and on domestic work (in 2011). It is therefore necessary that during this mandate the Workers' Group identifies the standards-setting items it wants to be included in the agenda of the International Labour Conferences after 2011.
10. One way of doing this will be for the Workers' Group to use the cyclical reviews under the Social Justice Declaration and the new modalities of the Article 19 to identify new topics for standard-setting.
11. In order to realize the full potential of the new modalities of Article 19 it will be important to have a critical mass of trade union responses to the Office questionnaire and a quality content allowing the Workers' Group to maximize the discussion at the International Labour Conference. In collaboration with the Workers' Group Secretariat and with the assistance of Actrav guidance will therefore be provided to national centres on the questionnaires (starting with those on employment and social security which should feed in the cyclical reviews planned for 2010 and 2011 respectively).
12. Priority should also be given to a more systematic inclusion of standards in decent work country programmes in order to use these programmes to promote the ratification and implementation of standards at country-level. In particular, attention should be given to the core conventions with a special focus on freedom of association and collective bargaining, the governance standards and to instruments related to the employment relationship and termination of employment, social security, occupational safety and health, gender as well as migrants. This will require cooperation between Actrav (headquarters and field), the Standards specialists, the technical departments (who have the responsibility of promoting standards) and the Secretariat of the Workers' Group.

Employment

13. The promotion of full and decent employment also needs to feature high in the ILO agenda. The Workers' Group will push for a re-prioritization of the work on employment based on the SJD. This is all the more urgent in light of the economic crisis. Placing employment and decent work at the centre of economic and social policies is also at the core of the Global Employment Agenda (GEA). The Workers' Group played an active role in the development of the GEA and called for its effective implementation since then. However, the GEA has not been adequately implemented at country level and most of the resources of the Employment Sector are currently allocated to programmes aimed at enterprise promotion. Priorities for the Workers' Group in the area of employment will therefore include:
 - To re-focus the implementation of the GEA by rebalancing the weight given by the Office to supply-side measures (such as skills or enterprise development) towards more demand-side policies. The ILO should scale-up its support to constituents to design responses to the crisis consistent with decent work and to develop macro-economic policies that promote employment and growth of aggregate demand according to the guidance provided by the macro-economic elements of the Global Employment Agenda.
14. Highlighting the importance of ILO work on employment with a focus on the special needs of the African continent and the need for trade union capacity-building:
 - To re-focus the implementation of the GEA by rebalancing the weight given by the Office to supply-side measures (such as skills or enterprise development) towards more demand-side policies. The ILO should scale-up its support to constituents to design responses to the crisis consistent with decent work and to develop macro-economic policies that promote employment and growth of aggregate demand according to the guidance provided by the macro-economic elements of the Global Employment Agenda.

¹ Article 5 c) of the Convention calls on member states in consultation with workers' and employers' organisations to examine at appropriate intervals un-ratified Conventions and Recommendations to which effect has not yet been given and to consider what measures might be taken to promote their ratification and implementation as appropriate

- The Workers' Group will also seek to influence the work on enterprise development by mapping out a worker agenda in the area of sustainable enterprises development and push for a greater focus by the ILO on issues related to working conditions and wages in small, medium and large companies and promotion of organising and collective bargaining. The Workers' Group will also seek to have more resources allocated to programmes promoting public enterprises as well as cooperatives which are all the more relevant as part of the crisis response.
- As a response to the crisis the Workers' Group will also seek to enhance ILO work to assist countries in increasing labour-intensive investments in infrastructures with a view to promote decent employment through public procurement (following the guidance of the Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 No. 94) and the up-grading of needed physical and social infrastructure particularly in developing countries. Support will also be given to the promotion of green jobs as part of the crisis response with a focus on the notion that green jobs have to be decent jobs also.

Global Social Architecture

15. In the context of the economic crisis policy coherence and building a new economic and social model become more relevant than ever. The IMF and the World Bank continue to impose austerity measures in several countries that have requested loans which have led to cuts in wages, public employment and social transfers. The IMF is recommending cuts in social expenditure to provide space for governments to spend huge amounts of tax payers' money on recapitalizing the private banks. Building upon the SJD and the mandate provided by the Philadelphia Declaration the Workers' Group will push for the ILO to examine - in all countries where the IMF and the World Bank are making loans in the context of the crisis - the employment and decent work implications of their policies and the conditionalities in particular. The ILO should also provide alternative policy advice to constituents in those countries to restore economic growth and decent employment.
16. The Workers' Group fully supports the development by the 2009 International Labour Conference of a Global Jobs Pact aimed at building tripartite commitment towards an ILO response to the crisis placing jobs, social justice and decent work at its core.
17. The GEA, SJD and the current economic crisis also require attention for trade and industrial policies. In this respect the workers group should pursue the commitment by the Director General to assess the impact of the WTO Doha negotiations on employment and decent work and to increase work in the office on assessing the impact of trade liberalization through bilateral agreements on employment and decent work. In addition more attention needs to be given to the role of trade and industrial policies in the shaping of decent work and productive employment.

Multinational Enterprises

18. In respect of multinationals, over the last years much of ILO work has been focusing on a greater promotion of the MNE Declaration as the benchmark for socially responsible corporate behaviour and on the development of a programme to provide companies with expert advice on the realization of the MNE Declaration and international labour standards. While this work will continue to be supported more attention will have to be given to the globalization of industrial relations as a response to the internationalization of company operations and to the role that the ILO and its constituents should play in shaping it. Guidance for this work will be drawn from the Social Justice Declaration. Greater synergies will also have to be built up with the sectoral activities programme.

Wages and working conditions

19. With the crisis, it has recently become even more critical than before that our Group prioritizes wage fixing and settlements. The financial crisis has led to a collapse of global aggregate demand. Governments and employers need therefore to commit themselves to wages policies that increase wages and maintain purchasing power including through coordinated collective bargaining and minimum living wages. A policy of wage cuts will trigger a deflationary spiral that will be damaging for workers and the economy.

20. Wages therefore need to be at the core of an agenda to promote decent work and poverty reduction. During its previous mandate the Workers' Group successfully promoted greater work on wages by the ILO. This resulted in the publication of the first Global Wage Report in November 2008 and agreement to continue to publish such a report every two years with a yearly update. This is essential in order to strengthen the ILO knowledge base on wage trends development, identify topics for future research, better orient policy responses and provide technical assistance to constituents and trade unions in particular. With the assistance of ACTRAV greater efforts should be made to disseminate the findings of these reports. The Workers' Group will therefore continue to support this important work and seek to scale it up in the next years. The Workers' Group will also seek to have the ILO doing more work on the concept of a minimum living wage. Priority will also be given to other dimensions of conditions of work including safety and health, maternity protection and work-family balance.

Social Security

21. The protection of working women and men and their families through comprehensive social security benefits as outlined in Convention No. 102 will also have to be given priority especially in light of the crisis. Building upon the SJD and the mandate of the Philadelphia Declaration the Workers' Group will also seek to include the adoption of an instrument on a basic social floor in a future ILC agenda.

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

22. The Workers' Group will also insist for greater work by the ILO on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining. In light of the 60th Anniversary of the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No 98), 1949, that will be celebrated in 2009 the Actrav Symposium will focus on collective bargaining and the Office will hold a high-level tripartite meeting to review trends in collective bargaining and identify an agenda for the promotion of this core right. The Workers' Group will use these two events and other relevant fora to develop an agenda of work that promotes the effective recognition of collective bargaining, provides support to the social partners to engage in collective bargaining and develops the ILO knowledge base, research capacity and policy advice on this fundamental right.
23. Efforts will also be made to enhance ILO work on export processing zones with a focus on freedom of association and collective bargaining and enforcement of other international labour standards with priority given to those countries with the largest concentration of export processing zones.

Migrant Workers

24. ILO work in promoting a right's based approach to migration and uphold of the principle of equal treatment in employment and occupation will continue to be strongly supported by the Workers' Group. The economic and social crisis provides a renewed mandate to this goal as experience shows that migrants face the risk of increasing discrimination at a time where loss of jobs exacerbate sentiments of racism and xenophobia towards migrants.

Unprotected work and informal economy

25. Another area that requires attention is the increasing trend towards atypical and unprotected forms of employment that are depriving many employees of labour and social protection and undermining union capacity to organise and bargain collectively. This was acknowledged by the SJD which highlighted the growth of unprotected work and informal work which impacts on the employment relationship. An increasing number of employers seek to avoid their obligations by disguising the employment relationship through bogus self-employed, sub-contracting or individual contracts of employment. The Workers' Group will therefore give priority to the effective implementation of the Recommendation on the Employment Relationship. More work is needed from the ILO in terms of policy advice and technical assistance for the implementation of this instrument at national level. The Workers' Group will also identify opportunities to raise the issue of precarious work in ILO meetings and activities starting in 2009 with the general discussion on gender (given the large proportion of women represented in atypical forms of employment) as well as in the events planned on collective bargaining.

26. The Workers' Group will also give priority to enhancing ILO work in the informal economy with the aim of mainstreaming it in the formal economy, addressing its decent work deficits and assist social partners to organise workers in the informal economy.

Decent Work Country Programmes

27. The Workers' Group will insist on the promotion of decent work country programmes based on a balanced articulation of the four strategic objectives and tripartite participation at country level. The Workers' Group will also seek to have more resources allocated to the capacity-building of trade union organisations including on issues such as economic policy and increase of trade union membership. Much remains to be done to achieve this objective. At the moment too many decent work country programmes do not promote the four dimensions of decent work in an equal manner and most of them are developed without the systematic involvement of trade unions. A greater governance of the way technical cooperation resources are allocated is also needed which will require a close collaboration between Actrav in headquarters and in the field and the Secretariat of the Workers' Group.

Decent Work Indicators

28. Office work on the development of decent work indicators will also have to be given priority as an important element to measure progress towards decent work and to strengthen the Office capacity for data collection.

ACTRAV

29. The Workers' Group reiterates the importance of ACTRAV in the ILO structure in promoting throughout the house the political priorities identified by the Workers' Group. An important task in this regard is for Actrav, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Workers' Group to ensure that Governing Body decisions are adequately followed-up and that labour concerns are properly included in the Office programmes. This is important if we want to ensure that the political gains we make at the International Labour Conferences and Governing Bodies are transformed into concrete actions that can benefit the trade union movement more broadly.
30. The Workers' Group will continue to push for a re-positioning of ACTRAV outside Sector IV in order to enhance its capacity of influencing the work of the house across all departments. Building upon the Social Justice Declaration one of our goals will be to make the Office work more efficient including by engaging in a discussion on a better functioning of the Governing Body and its committees with a view to strengthen the governance.
31. The increasing trend towards decentralizing activities to the field also calls for a strengthening of the collaboration and synergies between Actrav headquarters and the field. The area of decent work country programmes and the delivery as one-UN frame of work is certainly an area that requires attention in the future by ensuring that Actrav can support trade unions in the design, implementation and evaluation of decent work country programmes and that activities within the One-UN programmes reflect activities based on ILO mandate and strategic objectives. This is also linked to the review of the field structure where the Workers' Group will ensure that the specific role of Actrav in supporting trade unions is preserved in the field and that the Office improves its delivery of services to constituents and trade unions in particular.
32. Actrav including Actrav (Turin) should continue to give priority to workers' capacity building and development of training materials taking into account the new opportunities offered by the SJD. Efforts will also be made to better use Actrav in the dissemination of materials/documents.

26.02.2009/30.04.2009 (Rev)

ANNEX - Conventions and Recommendations to be ratified and implemented

Relevant ILO standards in the crisis context

- The Protection of Wages Convention (No. 95), 1949 and the Protection of Wages Recommendation (No. 85), 1949
- The Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Convention (No. 173), 1992 and the Protection of Workers' Claims (Employer's Insolvency) Recommendation (No. 180), 1992
- The Minimum Wage Fixing Convention (No. 131), 1970 and the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation (No. 135), 1970
- The Termination of Employment Convention (No. 158), 1982, and the Termination of Employment Recommendation (No. 166), 1982
- The Employment Relationship Recommendation (No. 198), 2006
- The Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) (No. 97), 1949
- The Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No. 143), 1975
- The Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention (No. 94), 1949
- The Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention (No. 151), 1978
- The Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 154), 1981
- The Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155), 1981
- The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87), 1948
- The Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98), 1949
- The Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), 1930
- The Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105), 1957
- The Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951
- The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958
- The Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), 1973
- The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182), 1999
- The Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102), 1952
- The Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention (No. 144), 1976
- The Tripartite Consultation (Activities of the International Labour Organisation) Recommendation (No. 152), 1976
- The Consultation (Industrial and National Levels) Recommendation (No. 113), 1960
- The Workers' Representatives Convention (No. 135), 1971
- The Employment Policy Convention (No. 122), 1964
- The Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81), 1947
- The Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention (No. 129), 1969
- The Promotion of Co-operatives Recommendation (No. 193), 2002
- The Human Resource Development Recommendation (No. 195), 2004

Gender standards

- The Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), 2000
- The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156), 1981
- The Part-Time Work Convention (No. 175), 1994
- The Home Work Convention (No. 177), 1996