

ILO Online: What is the ILO's contribution to addressing the HIV pandemic in Asia and the Pacific?

Sachiko Yamamoto: The ILO's rights-based approach to HIV/AIDS and the workplace is based on the key principles established in the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, adopted in 2001. Acting within this framework the ILO provides technical assistance to its tripartite constituents to ensure that a national HIV/AIDS workplace policy will be integrated into national HIV/AIDS programmes and policies and national strategies.

As one of ten co-sponsors of UNAIDS the ILO is the agency responsible for private sector mobilization and workplace policies and programmes. We make sure that HIV interventions in the world of work support the national AIDS strategy and contribute towards achieving the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

The ILO's network of field offices helps ensure the integration of HIV/AIDS into its Decent Work Country Programmes and provides technical support to build the capacity of governments, employers' and workers' organizations to deliver HIV programmes. The ILO approach is to combine the building of a legal-policy framework to protect rights with practical action at the workplace, using the existing structures and mechanisms of the world of work such as those in place for occupational safety and health.

The ILO tailors its programme to the populations and sectors that are vulnerable and at risk. It develops targeted prevention programmes aimed at economic sectors where the working situation and related living conditions may increase exposure to the risk of HIV. Depending on the country these may include tourism, transport, construction, mining and agriculture. For example, in Cambodia the ILO has developed education programmes for the garment sector, whose workforce is predominantly young and female. These sector-specific programmes are gender-sensitive and take into account the specific needs of men and women workers as well as their spouses and partners.

ILO action on HIV and labour migration focuses on developing effective safeguards for mobile and migrant workers in laws, policies and practices adopted by both sending and receiving countries – including regional harmonization of relevant provisions – and providing pre-departure training for internal and international migrants through government authorities and recruitment agencies.

ILO Online: What are the key challenges in addressing HIV/AIDS in the world of work in Asia and the Pacific?

Sachiko Yamamoto: In Asia and the Pacific the HIV prevalence rate is still generally low, although there are concentrated epidemics in certain areas and among certain populations. HIV prevention programmes at the workplace provide opportunities to reach men and women workers and target particular groups deemed to be at higher risk of HIV infection, such as adult men who buy sex or men who have sex with men. The vast majority of clients of sex workers are men working in the formal or informal economy. By supporting the development of sector-specific policies, guidelines and programmes, the ILO promotes a strategic, targeted approach to HIV prevention, support, treatment and care, and contributes to national strategies aimed at reaching populations that are most at risk.

Migrant and mobile workers may, due to the conditions of migration and/or mobile employment, be more vulnerable to the risk of HIV transmission than the general population. For example, certain factors can increase the HIV risks and vulnerabilities of migrant workers, including separation from families and homes,

language barriers, poor living and working conditions, discrimination and decreased access to HIV information and services.

ILO Online: What is the ILO's involvement in ICAAP 2009?

Sachiko Yamamoto: The ILO will be involved in a number of sessions, including two as organizer. In partnership with UNAIDS, UNDP and the Joint UN Initiative on Mobility and HIV/AIDS in South-East Asia (JUNIMA), the ILO is organizing a symposium on the impact of the financial crisis on labour migration and HIV. Experts and practitioners will exchange ideas and make recommendations on effective measures to ensure that migrants have adequate access to health care and HIV services throughout the migration cycle. The symposium will be chaired by His Excellency Erman Suparno, Minister of Manpower and Transmigration of Indonesia. Dr. Sophia Kisting, Director of the ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work, will be one of the key speakers.

The ILO is also organizing a satellite session on how to effectively reach clients of sex workers through workplace prevention programmes. The session will be chaired by the Director of the ILO Office for Indonesia and Timor-Leste, Mr. Alan Boulton, and will feature good practices from ILO workplace programmes for migrant construction workers in India and China. It will also provide a platform for other UN and non-UN organizations to share their experiences.

The ILO will show the film Never abandon, never give up, which stars the leading Chinese actor Wang Baoqiang, who is himself a former migrant construction worker in Beijing.

ILO Online: What is the future for the ILO's HIV/AIDS response in Asia and the Pacific?

Sachiko Yamamoto: In March 2007 the ILO Governing Body decided that a new international labour standard should be prepared on HIV/AIDS, with the aim of reinforcing the ILO Code of Practice and strengthening the contribution of the world of work to national AIDS responses. The first discussion of a proposed Recommendation on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work took place at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2009, with the participation of more than 200 representatives of governments and employers' and workers' organizations from the ILO's member States. The 2010 ILC will finalize the Recommendation's provisions and address the issue of its adoption. The new instrument recommends the establishment of national policies on HIV/AIDS and the world of work. ILO offices in all regions are likely to experience an increased demand from member States for information and support relating to its implementation.