With nearly 90 million people, Ethiopia is the second most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa and one of the most affected by the HIV epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa. With an estimated adult prevalence of 1.5% (1.9% for women and 1.0% for men), it has a large number of people living with HIV (approximately 793,700), and some 898,400 AIDS orphans. It needs to be noted that some regions are more affected than others, with a pick of 6.5% in the Gambella region.

Large-scale workplaces in Ethiopia face many challenges to maintain a healthy and productive workforce. Workers often spend weeks away from their families. Many are not familiar with sexually transmitted infection prevention methods.

THE RESPONSE

The MULU Worksites project is a USAID/PEPFAR funded project managed by World Learning Ethiopia in partnership with FHI 360, Population Service International (PSI), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The project seeks to implement gender-responsive workplace HIV combination prevention programmes that will strengthen the HIV response in large-scale workplaces employing over 500 persons. Construction, agriculture, leather, cement, mining and manufacturing sectors are a vital entry point for combination prevention, as they employ women and men engaged in high-risk behaviours such as commercial and transactional sex, and multiple concurrent partnerships.

Accordingly, the ILO has supported employers and workers to develop effective, gender-responsive workplace HIV and AIDS policies and has built their capacity to implement them through comprehensive programmes that encompass access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. In particular -

- workplace HIV committees have been established in 87 worksites, in line with the ILO Code of Practice and the ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No. 200)
- a standard training manual has been developed for HIV focal persons and taskforce members at the target worksites
- more than 150,000 leaflets have been disseminated on various aspects of HIV and AIDS, and 15,000 copies of the Amharic version of the Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No. 200), produced with support from previous ILO projects
- 50 worksites have been supported to develop gender-responsive workplace policies and establish HIV programmes.

The MULU HIV Prevention project has been targeting 100 selected large-scale workplaces in different parts of the country through a three-pillar coordinated HIV prevention programme consisting of biomedical, structural and behavioural HIV and AIDS components.

World Learning Ethiopia established a partnership agreement under the project with ILO in 2013 to implement measures as aiming at tackling the underlying social, organizational and policy factors driving the epidemic.
World Learning and the ILO have joined forces and used their skills and resources to create sustainable and gender-responsive HIV and AIDS response programmes in 100 workplaces in the country, using both public and private structures to ensure increased workers’ access to HIV services.

ILO has used this partnership to promote the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work (2001); the ILO Recommendation concerning HIV and AIDS and the World of Work, 2010 (No. 2010); and other international labour standards when considering workplace HIV and AIDS response policies and programs.

This partnership has allowed workers and employers, as well as the Ministry of Labour to link with health facilities at state and regional level to ensure their members and affiliates can benefit of HIV prevention and care services.