

# Gender equality at the heart of decent work



## WHY A GLOBAL ILO CAMPAIGN ON GENDER EQUALITY?

The year 2009 is significant in many ways for the International Labour Organization (ILO). It is the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the ILO, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its gender equality action plan and the year the International Labour Conference (ILC)<sup>1</sup> – the world's "parliament of labour" and the highest policy-making organ of the ILO – will hold a general discussion on "Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work".

In the lead-up to this discussion, the ILO is embarking on a global public awareness-raising initiative on gender equality and the world of work. This effort will be part of its overall Decent Work Campaign and a contribution to the celebration of the ILO's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

## SITUATING THE CAMPAIGN: DECENT WORK FOR ALL WOMEN AND MEN

Work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave the way for broader social and economic advancement, and strengthen individuals, their families and communities. Such progress, however, requires work that is decent.

Decent Work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. The ILO is devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen social dialogue. For many women, however, access to rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue is limited. As a result, particular attention is paid to gender equality in ILO's work.

<sup>1</sup> The 181 member States of the ILO meet at the International Labour Conference, held every year in Geneva, Switzerland, in the month of June. Each member State is represented by a delegation consisting of government, employer and worker delegates. Many of the government representatives are cabinet ministers responsible for labour affairs in their own countries. Heads of State and prime ministers also take the floor at the Conference.

## GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT WORK

Gender equality and non-discrimination have been fundamental principles underpinning the work of the ILO since its creation. All ILO standards apply equally to men and women. Some specifically address women; one of the ILO's first conventions in 1919 dealt with maternity protection. In addition, the ILO has adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy to actively redress gender-based inequalities in policies, programmes, and projects to enable both women and men to participate – and equally benefit from – development efforts.

The International Labour Organization was founded in 1919, in the wake of a destructive war, to pursue a vision based on the premise that universal, lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon the fair treatment of working people. A rights-based organization, the ILO has the mandate of developing and supervising international labour standards, and ensuring that they are respected in practice as well as in principle. ILO's tripartite constituency of governments, employers and workers of its member States provides a unique platform and an advantage in incorporating 'real world' knowledge and expertise about employment and work so as to jointly shape policies and programmes. The ILO became the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The campaign aims to:

- increase general awareness and understanding of gender equality issues in the world of work;
- highlight the specific linkages between gender equality and securing decent work for all women and men;
- promote the ratification and application of key ILO gender equality labour standards; and
- advocate the importance of overcoming existing barriers to gender equality as beneficial for all.

## TWELVE THEMES

The campaign is built around twelve Decent Work themes. It is a one-year campaign, starting in June 2008 and ending in June 2009.

The selected themes will be looked at through a gender lens, showing how various issues may affect women and men differently in their access to rights, employment, social protection and social dialogue, such as:

- highlighting maternity protection, paternity and work,
- combating child labour through access to education for both girls and boys,
- workplace family policies to help overcome the problems of male and female workers with family responsibilities in better balancing work-family issues,
- breaking through gender stereotypes in youth employment,

- recognizing different consequences for women and men migrant workers and their families,
- underlining the different occupational health and safety issues for women and men workers,
- focussing on the different issues facing older women and men workers.





## Campaign materials

For each of the campaign themes, an information brief will be made available, accompanied by a poster and postcards.

The **ILO website – [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)** – will give direct access to the campaign webpage where campaign materials will be uploaded. Links will be provided to facilitate access to additional ILO information (such as relevant units, projects, and publications) on each of the campaign themes.



More information on specific items and material can be requested through the campaign e-mail address **[gendercampaign@ilo.org](mailto:gendercampaign@ilo.org)**.

## Campaign events

Events on gender equality themes may be organized by ILO offices in different regions throughout the year. Information on these events will be posted on the [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org) campaign website.

### SOME FACTS ON GENDER AND THE WORLD OF WORK

- Globally women's unemployment rates have remained higher than men's, despite the increasing number of women entering the labour market<sup>2</sup>;
- Many women still work without pay in agriculture and family owned businesses<sup>3</sup>;
- Men are more often employed in dangerous jobs than women, and occupational accident rates are higher for men<sup>4</sup>;
- Men are increasingly expecting that their rights as workers with family responsibilities be recognized, including paternity leave;
- Women are disproportionately represented in informal employment, characterized by low pay, poor working conditions and lack of protection;
- Even though there are more women in high-status jobs today, the gender pay gap still persists around the world<sup>5</sup>;
- Jobs for female migrants are concentrated in less regulated sectors, making them more vulnerable to exploitation and unequal treatment (for example, domestic workers);
- There are more boys in child labour than girls<sup>6</sup>. However, girls' work is difficult to capture as it is less visible and is compounded by additional household chores.

<sup>2</sup> Worldwide, the female unemployment rate stood at 6.4% compared to the male rate of 5.7%, *Global Employment Trends for Women*, ILO 2008, table p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Globally, less than 70 women are economically active for every 100 men, *ibid.*, table p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2005: a background paper*, InFocus Programme on SafeWork, ILO, Geneva.

<sup>5</sup> On average worldwide, women's income per hour worked is about 75% of men's, *Equality at work: Tackling the challenges – Global report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*, ILO 2007, p. 19–23.

<sup>6</sup> According to ILO-IPEC estimates, six out of ten working children 12–17 years are boys.

### Reaching out to partners

The campaign actively reaches out to ILO constituents and to the general public. For example, the campaign supports:

- Activities around the campaign themes undertaken by governments, employers' and workers' organizations;
- Efforts made by women's associations, gender equality civil society groups and various academic gender and labour institutions to highlight the key issues;
- Sharing of experiences, stories, video footage, photographs, and facts illustrating gender equality and/or gender-based discrimination in the world of work;
- Promoting gender equality and decent work stories through local media and press, for example written articles, radio programmes or local television featuring special programmes.

There continues to be a gap between the rights set out in international labour standards and national legislation and the real situation of most women and men workers. These rights must be made effective in practice. A major obstacle preventing workers from exercising their rights is a lack of awareness of their existence. Dissemination of information about these rights is, therefore, a vital way for improving gender equality at work.

### The key ILO Conventions on gender equality

- The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) is among the most widely ratified. It requires member States to pursue a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating discrimination;
- The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) specifically addresses the issue of equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value;
- The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) addresses issues concerning workers with dependent children and family members in need of care or support;
- The Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) covers maternity leave; benefits; and relevant employment protection and non-discrimination issues.



International Labour Office

Bureau for Gender Equality  
International Labour Office  
4, route des Morillons  
1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland  
Tel : +41 22 799 6730  
Fax : +41 22 799 6388  
Email : [gendercampaign@ilo.org](mailto:gendercampaign@ilo.org)  
[www.ilo.org/gender](http://www.ilo.org/gender)

