

ILO Workers' Group Priorities

Background

1. This document is the result of consultations held by the Chair of the Workers' Group with members of the Group, its Secretariat and the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV).
2. The Workers' Group priorities are set in a context characterized by a deepening of the 2008 financial and economic crisis. The world is now facing its most serious jobs crisis since the Great Depression with devastating consequences for workers and their families. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, income inequalities are widening, precarious and informal work are rising, trade union and labour rights are under growing attack. The role of social dialogue in addressing the economic crisis, recovery and economic and social issues in general is undermined. In the case of developing countries the crisis is coming on top of other crisis - such as speculations on food, fuel and other raw materials - and has exacerbated the imbalances of an unsustainable development model. A sentiment of injustice and insecurity is growing among workers as they are made to pay for a crisis which was not of their making while its root causes have yet to be addressed. The world is also confronted with the urgency of addressing the challenge of climate change and its related social and employment effects.
3. In this context the mandate of the International Labour Organisation to promote social justice is as important today as it was in 1919 when the world was coming out of its first world conflict. In the lead up to its 100th Anniversary the ILO has a crucial role to play in ensuring that the labour and social dimensions of the crisis are addressed. In so doing it can rely on its constitution, the Social Justice Declaration (2008) and the Global Jobs Pact (2009) that all contain rich and relevant guidance to promote a more equitable growth model.
4. The Workers' Group will be guided by these documents and will seek to ensure their comprehensive implementation. The Group will push for the Office to act as one ILO instead of the prevailing "silo" approach to issues. ILO Regional and country Offices will have to better support and follow-up on governance organs decisions and better service workers' interests. Work needs to be re-prioritized in order to enhance ILO contribution to the development of a growth model that delivers decent jobs and benefit workers.
5. In light of the above the Workers' Group commits to the following set of priorities.

International Labour Standards

6. The development of international labour standards, their ratification, implementation and supervision lie at the core of the ILO mandate. Without respect for trade union and workers' rights there cannot be a fair globalization and decent jobs.
7. New patterns of work and a globalized economy require more workers' protection, not less. This is why the ILO has to continue to set standards. The Workers' Group will therefore pursue an agenda whereby the International Labour Conference has at least one standard-setting item every year on its agenda. One way to achieve this is to ensure that recurrent item discussions under the follow-up to the Social Justice Declaration are used to identify gaps in regulations and areas for possible new standards. ILO technical departments will also have to be more pro-active in identifying gaps in protection and proposing standard-setting items. ACTRAV over the next five years - in coordination with the Workers' Group Secretariat - will also assist the Workers' Group in the identification through research and analytical work of possible areas for new standards.
8. Once trust between the parties in support of the ILO standard policy including the ILO supervisory mechanism is re-built, the Workers' Group will be open to discuss with governments and employers the common principles to guide the standard review mechanism. Such mechanism should result in a robust

and up-to-date body of standards for the purpose of the protection of workers. It should also lead to higher ratification rates and greater Office promotional work.

9. Another priority is to increase the ratification rates of selected standards. A limited number of instruments have been identified in order to ensure effectiveness. This should not however preclude work on any other standard and the list that follows will be subject to regular review:
 - Core conventions with a focus on C.87 and C.98
 - Governance standards (C.122, C.144, C.81, C.129 – employment policy, tripartite consultations, labour inspection)
 - C.189/R.201 (decent work for domestic workers)
 - C.102 (Social Security) and R.202 (Social Protection Floors)
 - R.198 (Employment relationship)
 - C.158/R.166 (termination of employment)
 - C.131 (minimum wages)
 - C.155/187 (OSH) and R.200 (HIV and Aids and the world of work)
 - C.183 (maternity protection) and C.156 (workers with family responsibilities)
 - C.151 (labour relations in public services)/C.154 (collective bargaining)
 - C.97 and 143 (migrant workers)
 - C.94 (labour clauses in public contracts)
 - C.169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples)
10. ACTRAV, in coordination with the Workers' Group Secretariat, will assist in the preparation of information on the instruments, campaign materials, training, identification of priority countries (developed and developing) and unions to get involved in the campaign. Assistance will also be sought from ILO technical departments. Workers' Group members will commit to work towards the ratification of one or more of these standards not yet ratified by their countries. Efforts will be made to assist any other trade union organisation interested in promoting one or more of these standards including through their inclusion in Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs).
11. A key priority for the Workers' Group is to ensure adequate follow-up to the conclusions of the 2012 Conference discussion on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The Group will support the continued promotion of universal ratification of the core conventions with a particular focus on C.87 and 98, the enabling rights. Priority will also be given to holding a meeting of experts to address the impact of precarious employment over the exercise of rights - particularly the right to organise and bargain collectively. Building upon the November 2012 discussion in the Governing Body the Workers' Group will support the development of a Recommendation on facilitating a gradual transition from the informal to the formal economy. Strategies of formalization (such as labour law coverage, extension of social protection, minimum wages and appropriate economic policies) will have to go hand in hand with extending rights and protection to those still working in the informal economy.
12. The Workers' Group as part of the Conference follow-up will also support a new instrument to supplement ILO Convention 29 to address prevention and victim protection, including compensation as well as human trafficking for labour exploitation.
13. The Workers' Group will also advocate for increased coherence in the way member states and organisations of the multilateral system address fundamental principles and rights at work. This is essential as austerity measures implemented as a solution to the crisis have not worked out and have resulted in severe attacks to freedom of association, collective bargaining, employment protection legislation and other aspects of labour legislation. The Workers' Group will therefore expect stronger advocacy from the ILO internationally and at country level to ensure that exit strategies to the crisis fully respect fundamental workers' rights and that trade unions are involved at national level in discussions on strategies to exit the crisis.

14. The Workers' Group re-asserts the value of the jurisprudence developed through the ILO supervisory mechanism including on the right to strike. ACTRAV - in coordination with the Secretariat of the Workers' Group - will disseminate key findings and jurisprudence to trade union organisations. ACTRAV will also continue to provide capacity-building on the ILO supervisory mechanism. In coordination with the Workers' Group Secretariat ACTRAV will also assist in the follow-up to the cases of the Committee on the Application of Standards.

Employment and policy coherence

15. Several documents adopted on a tripartite basis provide relevant guidance in the area of employment: the Global Employment Agenda (2003), the Social Justice Declaration (2008), the Global Jobs Pact (2009), the conclusions of the recurrent item discussion on employment under the follow-up to the Social Justice Declaration (2010) and the conclusions on the Youth Employment Crisis (2012).

16. The current jobs crisis and very high unemployment among youth give a renewed impetus to the urgent need for the ILO to enhance its expertise and country advice on macro-economic policies that put decent employment at the centre of economic and social policies. As developing the productive capacities in the various sectors is key for job creation, the Workers' Group will push for more ILO research and advocacy on industrial policy and development including on the linkages between industrial policy, investment and trade policy in providing space for developing countries to build their manufacturing industries and provide decent and well-paid jobs.

17. After a wide range of publications and research papers on the trade and employment nexus it is time for the ILO to shift focus towards a more critical approach to trade and investment liberalization. The ILO should undertake assessments of negotiated bilateral and multilateral trade and investment agreements on employment, development and decent work as well as assist constituents with policy advice.

18. What is currently happening in Europe as part of the crisis response and which already happened in many developing countries with the dramatic consequences that we know is the continued attempts by the IMF and World Bank, now joined by the OECD, European Commission and European Central Bank, to impose austerity measures that cut wages, public employment and social transfers as part of their loans requirements and country advice. These policies in turn deregulate labour markets without creating employment, and do not contribute to the stimulation of aggregate demand which is so much needed to exit the crisis.

19. The Workers' Group therefore considers that - building upon the Social Justice Declaration and the constitutional mandate provided by the Philadelphia Declaration - a key priority for the ILO is to examine the employment and decent work implications of the policies and conditionalities imposed by these organisations and to change them. To do so the ILO should enhance its capacity to provide alternative policy advice at country level on strategies to exit the crisis that restore economic growth, respect rights and promote decent employment and wages.

20. Other priorities in the area of employment include a better use of the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) together with its revised follow-up mechanism as a strategy to promote decent work in global supply chains. Efforts will also be made to enhance cooperation between the ILO and OECD to promote good corporate behaviour based on the MNE Declaration and OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises. The Workers' Group will also push for the ILO to ensure that international labour standards are adequately addressed in initiatives on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

21. To address the challenges of climate change, the Workers' Group will push for greater ILO advocacy on the promotion of green jobs including the need for green jobs to be decent jobs, industrial development and transformation. Just transition and the promotion of relevant international labour standards in the transition to a low-carbon economy should also be higher on the ILO agenda.

Rights based approach to migration

22. The Workers' Group re-affirms the key role that the ILO should play in promoting a gender-sensitive and rights' based approach to migration based upon its standards (C.97 and 143) and the principle of equal treatment and opportunities. The crisis provides a renewed urgency to the implementation of this mandate as many migrants are victims of racism, xenophobia and discrimination that maintain them in indecent and poorly paid jobs. The Workers' Group will also demand a key place for the ILO in the global governance on migration with a particular focus on the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development and the Global Migration Group.

Collective bargaining and labour laws

23. The Workers' Group will use the 2013 recurrent item discussion on social dialogue to enhance ILO work on collective bargaining. Work that started on enhancing the knowledge base on trends and innovations in collective bargaining coverage and the role that collective bargaining plays in labour market governance is welcomed and will have to be stepped up together with greater advocacy and capacity-building at country level to ensure the effective recognition of this enabling right particularly in periods of crisis.

24. Another important priority for the 2013 Conference discussion will be to make labour laws and institutions effective including the recognition of the employment relationship. Already before the crisis there was a clear trend towards the increase of atypical and un-protected forms of employment including large informal economies in developing countries. The ILO needs to document these trends and identify strategies to ensure that workers are not deprived from the rights they are entitled to and that strategies to formalize the informal economy are put in place. The Workers' Group will also give priority to the conclusions of the 2011 ACTRAV Symposium on Precarious Employment and push the ILO to enhance its research and advocacy on the impact of precarious employment on rights - with a focus on freedom of association and collective bargaining - wages and aggregate demand and on strategies to promote direct and stable employment relationships. ACTRAV, in coordination with the Secretariat of the Workers' Group, will assist trade union organisations to use the Employment Relationship Recommendation, Nr 198 (2006).

25. The Workers' Group will also push for a better use of the ILO sectoral activities to address precarious work and decent work deficits in specific sectors through sectoral meetings, promotional activities of sectoral conventions and development of tools, as well as by strengthening cooperation between the sectoral activities department and other ILO departments.

Social security, wages and working conditions

26. The extension of social security to all in its vertical and horizontal dimensions will continue to be a priority. The Workers' Group will support efforts to promote the implementation of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation together with the ratification of Convention 102 as tools to promote economic and social development, lift people out of poverty and formalize the informal economy.

27. As part of its crisis recovery advocacy the ILO has to continue to strengthen its knowledge base and advocacy on wage trends and policies. The Workers' Group will continue to support the publication of the Global Wage Report and seek to enhance ILO work on wage-led growth including through the promotion of wage policies, minimum wages, extended collective bargaining coverage, promotion of social protection floors and strategies to address the gender pay gap and growing inequalities. With the assistance of ACTRAV and in coordination with the Workers' Group Secretariat a global campaign on income security will be launched covering in particular minimum wages and social protection floors.

28. Efforts will be made to enhance the ILO profile and knowledge base in the area of occupational safety and health (OSH) including through promotion of OSH standards and the role of trade unions in the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment. Priority will also be given to the follow-up to the conclusions of

the meeting of experts on working time in view of the 2015 recurrent item discussion on labour protection. The Group will seek to enhance ILO work on strategies to address gender-based violence in the world of work - including through standard-setting - in light of the world-wide nature of the problem and the serious implications for women's rights.

Strengthening the ILO statistical, research and analytical capacities

29. The Workers' Group fully supports the strengthening of the ILO's statistical, research and analytical capacities. Priority should therefore be given to high-quality and evidence-based macro-economic research in order to provide an alternative to the mainstream economic ideology promoted by the International Financial Institutions, OECD, European Commission, WTO and others. Such research should be based on ILO core values and the decent work concept and be used to promote alternative policies including through advice at country level and advocacy at international level in various forums (G20, IFIs, UN). The Workers' Group will also press for the work on the measurement of decent work indicators in particular the numerical indicators of labour rights to be published.

Technical cooperation and Decent Work Country Programmes

30. The Workers' Group will be pushing for technical cooperation programmes that enhance the capacity of trade unions to engage in all aspects of the decent work agenda. The Group will insist that DWCPs reflect the four dimensions of the decent work agenda. ACTRAV - in consultation with the Workers' Group Secretariat - should assist unions to integrate the priorities of the Workers' Group in DWCPs and to be involved in all phases of their development. The Workers' Group will further push for a more equal distribution of technical cooperation resources across the four strategic objectives.

ACTRAV

31. The Workers' Group reiterates the importance of ACTRAV in the ILO structure in promoting throughout the house the priorities identified by the Workers' Group. ACTRAV, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Workers' Group, should ensure that Governing Body and Conference decisions are followed-up and that labour concerns are properly included in all ILO work. This calls for engagement of ACTRAV with ILO technical departments. ACTRAV - in consultation with the Workers' Group Secretariat - should also produce analysis, research and guidance on relevant technical issues to assist the Workers' Group in determining its position.

32. The Workers' Group will also ensure that the role of ACTRAV in supporting trade unions at national and regional levels is strengthened.

33. The Workers' Group stresses the importance of the Turin Centre in realizing the objectives of the ILO. The Group reasserts the value of ACTRAV Turin in providing workers with capacity building related to the decent work agenda and in the challenges confronting the labour movement.

Evaluation

34. This set of priorities and progress made in their achievement will be reviewed as needed and at least once a year.

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