

Introduction

Work is a key element of social and economic development. Jobs are a key concern for the people in surveys and opinion polls all around the world. Through job creation and better working conditions people, communities and countries can lift themselves out of poverty and improve livelihoods. But this happens only when work is decent, productive, provides fair wages, underpinned by rights. Decent work contributes directly to poverty eradication and reduction of income inequality.

The importance of decent work for development and poverty eradication was already recognised in the Millennium Development Goals, where a specific target on full and decent employment was added under the poverty goal (MDG1b). The employment target, however, has not received the attention it deserved and remained far from being achieved, undermining global efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable human development.

The new global development agenda offers an opportunity to refocus global efforts on decent job creation. A specific goal on full and decent employment should be introduced, accompanied by national employment targets and indicators as well as suggested policy measures.

The global employment challenge

Over 200 million people were unemployed in 2012, including 75 million young people (ILO, 2012a). Unemployment not only pushes many people below the poverty line, but also increases economic and social inequality, as employment rates vary for different social groups, with women and youth being in particularly precarious situations. A prolonged jobs crisis, global economic crisis and the uncertain economic future, combined with growing economic and social inequality and radical demographic changes make the social, political and economic systems at country and global level unprecedentedly fragile and prone to shocks. People live in a growing instability and insecurity, often resulting in social and political tensions.

Even those who have jobs often suffer from insecurity resulting from underemployment or casual and vulnerable employment. Informal economy remains a growing concern, especially in developing countries, where they account for between 35 and 90% of total employment, majority being women (ILO, 2012b). Workers in the informal economy often lack access to health care, retirement pensions, maternity leave and other social transfers, keeping their social income much lower than their counterparts in formal economy (UN, 2007) and making them more vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. Nearly 1/3 of all workers live with their families below the poverty line, many of them women and/or working in the informal economy.

Development Goal: full and decent employment

The Post-2015 Development Agenda should include a global goal on reaching full and decent employment. The goal should be accompanied by country-level targets on reducing precarious work, ensuring a living wage, investment in green job promotion, as well as complying with international labour rights and gender equality at the workplace.

Building a supportive policy environment

Decent job generation requires adequate and coherent national and international policies focused on the promotion of an inclusive and sustained job-intensive economic growth. Integrated national macroeconomic, trade, finance, investment, active labour market and social policies are the key and should be accompanied by coherent international policies that support inclusive growth, while leaving enough policy space for countries to pursue their development plans.

National policies should include investment in labour intensive infrastructure (in particular ones that generate green jobs); support to small and micro business (through infrastructure development and ensuring reliable access to sound finance); support to increase agriculture productivity; investment in proper training and education, and ensuring universal social protection floors.

The Decent Work Agenda

The ILO Decent Work Agenda (DWA) provides a useful, rights-based reference for the understanding of decent work and its components as well as indicators for the measurement of the progress on its implementation. The DWA is a comprehensive policy framework built on four strategic objectives, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective: creating jobs; guaranteeing rights at work; extending social protection and promoting social dialogue. Its implementation is supported through integrated Decent Work Country Programmes.

Possible targets and indicators:

Target	Indicator(s)
Full and productive employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment-to-population ratio• Employment growth rate• Annual hours worked per employed persons• Labour productivity – GDP per employed person
Reduction of vulnerable employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment• Share of people engaged in informal work relations among the active population
Reduction of the working poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proportion of employed people living below 1.25\$ a day• Wage inequality
Introduction of a living wage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Low pay rate• Minimum wage as % of median wage
Ensuring rights at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ratification of the eight ILO Core Labour Conventions
Ensuring gender equality at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 183 on maternity protection, No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities and No. 189 on domestic workers• Gender wage gap
Ensuring decent working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive hours• Occupational injury rate (fatal and non-fatal)
Ensuring effective social dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Union density rate• Enterprises belonging to employer organisation• Collective bargaining coverage rate
Ensuring universal social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share of population aged 65 and above benefiting from a pension• Public social security expenditure (% GDP)• Beneficiaries of cash income support (% of the poor)• Share of population covered by basic health care provisions

References:

ILO (2012). *Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a deeper jobs crisis*, Geneva: ILO

ILO (2012). *Trade Union manual on the Millennium Development Goals*, Geneva: ACTRAV

UN (2007). *The Employment Imperative. Report on the World Social Situation 2007*. New York: United Nations

About the ITUC

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is the main international trade union organisation, representing the interests of working people worldwide. Our primary mission is the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions.

The ITUC represents 175 million workers in 153 countries.

Contact us!

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