

Sectoral Activities Department

The Sectoral Activities Department (SECTOR) promotes decent work by addressing social and labour issues in specific economic sectors, both at international and national levels. By tackling challenges and development issues of great importance for specific sectors, the International Labour Organization (ILO) assists governments, employers and workers to develop policies and programmes aimed at enhancing economic opportunities and improving working conditions in each sector.



Over the years, SECTOR has implemented a number of national activities at industry level. Social dialogue is at the heart of sectoral work, but all other pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda – employment creation, labour rights and social protection – have also been addressed as a result of SECTOR's cross-cutting nature.

The ILO sectoral approach

The sectoral approach is cross-cutting throughout the entire Decent Work Agenda and it allows the ILO to respond comprehensively to sectors' specific needs. SECTOR carries out its work by:

- (a) promoting and supporting the implementation of international labour standards, with particular attention given to those of a sectoral nature;
- (b) building consensus among sectoral constituents at global, regional and national levels to reach policy- and action-oriented recommendations in relation to emerging topics of special importance for the sectors;

- (c) developing and sharing knowledge on emerging trends and challenges at industry level through the collection and analysis of sector-specific data, focused research, and publication of reports and working papers;
- (d) strengthening the capacity of governments, employers' and workers' organizations for advancing the Decent Work Agenda at country level, through the implementation of action programmes and technical cooperation projects, as well as through the provision of technical assistance and training; and
- (e) enhancing policy coherence at global level for the promotion of decent work at sectoral level, through partnerships with other United Nations agencies and multilateral organizations on key sectoral issues.



Sectoral Conventions and Recommendations

The ILO has adopted sector-specific international Conventions and Recommendations in **agriculture, commerce, construction, fishing, health services, hotels and restaurants, mining, public service, road transport and shipping**. The ILO has also worked with other international organizations to develop, and assist to implement, standards that rely on the principles and concepts of international labour standards, in sectors such as **culture and education**. Targeted assistance is provided at country level for the ratification and effective implementation of sectoral Conventions, with an emphasis on those standards dealing with the most hazardous occupations.

To support the implementation of the sectoral Conventions and Recommendations, as well as to assist the improvement of working conditions at the sectoral level, a rich body of sectoral tools have been developed, translated and widely disseminated.

They consist of codes of practice (e.g. **agriculture, metals, mining, ports**); guidelines (e.g. **road transport, health services, shipbreaking**); manuals and toolkits (e.g. **construction, education, railways**).

The International Labour Organization has been developing, since 1919, a system of international labour standards that are aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. In today's globalized economy, international labour standards are essential components in the international framework for ensuring that the growth of the global economy provides benefits to all. (Source: <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/introduction-to-international-labour-standards/lang--en/index.htm>.)

Sector-specific Conventions and Recommendations have been designed to promote decent work in a specific sector. Their ratification and implementation are instrumental to ensuring decent working conditions for the workers and promoting social dialogue in that sector. Some sectoral Conventions include:

- Work in **Fishing** Convention, 2007 (No. 188)
- **Maritime** Labour Convention, 2006 (Consolidated ILO Maritime Labour Standards)
- Safety and Health in **Agriculture** Convention, 2001 (No. 184)
- Safety and Health in **Mines** Convention, 1995 (No. 176)
- Safety and Health in **Construction** Convention, 1988 (No.167)
- Labour Relations (**Public Service**) Convention, 1978 (No. 151)
- **Nursing Personnel** Convention, 1977 (No. 149)



Consensus building: International tripartite meetings

Several times per year, representatives of governments, employers' and workers' organizations from different countries and regions meet at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva, to participate in tripartite sectoral international meetings and global dialogue forums. Based on the most up-to-date research produced by the ILO, the tripartite representatives meet to debate emerging issues, main trends and challenges of their sector.

Consensus reached during such sectoral meetings results in recommendations for policy and action in the sectors. These recommendations, adopted at the end of the meetings, serve as a basis for the development of national policies and programmes, and provide guidance to constituents at international as well as country level.



Knowledge sharing and development

The Sectoral Activities Department is the ILO's repository of knowledge on sector-specific labour and social issues. Research and studies conducted in line with the ILO's research policies deal with emerging and priority issues of strong interest for ILO's sectoral constituents.

Working Papers, vehicles for disseminating information on a range of topics related to the world of work and the evolution of social and labour policies and practices for a given sector, are regularly published and widely disseminated. Background reports and issues papers, which provide more in-depth analysis on specific issues, are also published for discussion at international tripartite meetings and global dialogue forums.

SECTOR also collects and systematizes sector-specific data, including trends in employment, at country level. Data and analyses are published in sectoral country profiles designed to be used to support social dialogue processes with constituents and policy-makers at the international and national levels.

Capacity building

Capacity building of constituents is carried out through specialized training and advisory services to governments, employers' and workers' organizations at sectoral level, with an emphasis on the most hazardous sectors (e.g. **agriculture, construction, fishing, mining**).

The training of portworkers is a key developmental issue, both for increasing the competitiveness of the port industry as well as for promoting occupational safety and health. The ILO ***Portworker Development Programme*** (PDP), initiated in 1985, builds on constantly updated training materials, which provide governments and port management effective and systematic training schemes designed to specifically meet the needs of container terminals and other container handling facilities.

Delivered by a team of specially trained instructors from an institutional network around the world, the PDP contributes to improving performance, working conditions and practices, and safety and welfare of portworkers. Under a special agreement with the ILO, those institutions are provided with the necessary tools to perform the training by themselves. Instructors are trained to provide the courses in accordance to the priorities and needs of each port and currently the Programme is being implemented in more than 50 countries around the world.

Training programmes are implemented at regional and national levels based on materials specifically designed to address priority issues, such as prevention of HIV and AIDS, promotion of occupational safety and health, and enforcement of labour inspection in particular sectors.

Technical cooperation and action programmes

Technical cooperation is an important instrument and a fundamental means of action of the ILO in the fulfilment of its mission, the realization of its objectives, and building the capacity of its constituents, particularly at the local level.

In collaboration with sectoral social partners, technical cooperation projects are implemented to directly address specific themes, such as child labour, working conditions, social protection, and employment generation, at the country level. Through



South-South and triangular cooperation, sector-specific good practices and experiences are shared among developing and emerging economies. Public–private partnerships complement and expand sectoral work, in particular along supply chains.

Action Programmes, implemented by the ILO at the national level, are a mix of research, technical and policy advice, and training carried out using sectoral social dialogue. An action programme supports a social dialogue platform, where a particular sector's issues within a country can be addressed through activities which are designed and implemented through a tripartite national action plan.

Decent Work Country Programmes

The sectoral approach is highly effective, as it is at the sector level that governments, employers' and workers' organizations are typically best placed to shape the world of work. It thus offers an opportunity for the tripartite constituents to foster the Decent Work Agenda, particularly within the framework of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs). The sectoral perspective on decent work therefore needs to be considered at the design stages of DWCPs, so that interventions can be tailored to the specific social and labour challenges faced by a country. By examining decent work through a sectoral lens, issues of deep concern in specific economic areas are not overlooked in national programmes and can be used as stepping stones to address systemic shortcomings.

Groupings of sectors

In order to best cover the different economic sectors, sectoral work is organized around eight groupings. The priorities for each grouping are determined through consultations with the tripartite constituents and reflect the overall priorities of the ILO. Cross-sectoral activities are also undertaken to address issues and problems that cut across several sectors, as well as to encourage the exchange of experiences between specific sectors.

- **Agriculture and forestry** grouping covers the following sectors:
 - Agriculture, plantations, other rural sectors
 - Food, drink, tobacco
 - Forestry, wood, pulp, paper

Agriculture and food processing are, in most countries, strategic sectors by virtue of their role as producers of food, providers of employment and sources of foreign exchange. These two sectors, related through a value-chain, are a prime engine of growth in the process of development. Since the adoption of Agenda 21, the world has reached a consensus on the importance of sustainable forest management. Forest management therefore plays an important role in the process of economic development by generating considerable revenue and benefits for the enterprises and workers concerned. The ILO has been at the forefront in developing social standards for sustainable forest management based on the clear relationship between sustainable development and labour standards in the forestry sector.



● **Education and research** grouping covers the following sectors:

- Pre-school and childcare
- Compulsory schooling (primary/secondary)
- Vocational training
- Higher education and research
- Non-teaching personnel

Much of the ILO work for this grouping relates to teaching personnel, in close co-operation with the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to monitor and assist constituents to apply the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, 1966,



and the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching

Personnel, 1997, both of which rely heavily on key principles and provisions of international labour standards. The Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART) periodically reports on trends and recommends policies and actions to ILO constituents designed to improve the status of teachers, and therefore greater access to and quality of education systems.

- **Energy and mining** grouping covers the following sectors:

- Oil and gas production, oil refining
- Mining

The energy and mining grouping comprises the exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas and the extraction of coal and minerals. Since all industrial activity directly or indirectly relies on these sectors, sound industrial relations and good working conditions in these sectors are key. Given that mining continues to be one of the most hazardous occupations, the promotion of the ILO Convention on Safety and Health in Mines, 1995 (No. 176), is particularly important to ensuring decent working conditions for the workers in that sector.



- **Infrastructure, construction and related industries** grouping covers the following sector:

- Construction

The construction sector is highly labour-intensive and one of the largest employers worldwide. It is a major gateway for new job seekers, especially for the unskilled and migrant workers, thus contributing to social



and economic development and poverty reduction. The industry faces a number of challenges such as a high level of informalization, and lack of social security and accident insurance in different countries. Occupational health problems and accidents remain a key concern in the construction sector, and the ILO will continue to promote the Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No. 167).

- **Manufacturing** grouping covers the following sectors:

- Basic metal production
- Mechanical and electrical engineering
- Transport equipment manufacture
- Chemical industries
- Textiles, clothing, leather, footwear



Manufacturing transforms raw materials into intermediate and consumer products using energy, machines and human labour. The products range from microchips to satellites, from toothbrushes to trains, from petroleum to t-shirts and, more recently, new industries have emerged to recycle end-of-life products – cars, ships, computers etc. – back into usable raw materials. In order to improve working conditions, occupational safety and health and industry-wide respect for rights at work, the ILO promotes social dialogue and tripartite action, for example, on restructuring in the chemical industry, on improving competitiveness in the textile and clothing industries through decent work in Egypt, Morocco and Sri Lanka, as well as on the implementation of sectoral codes of practice in the iron and steel industries. Recycling of industrial products, such as ships and electrical and electronic equipment, continues to be a growing challenge, as this often takes place in the informal economy with sub-standard working conditions.

- **Private services** grouping covers the following sectors:

- Commerce
- Financial services
- Hotels, catering and tourism
- Professional and management staff
- Postal
- Telecoms, IT and business services
- Media, culture, graphical



Private service sectors are of growing importance to the economy in countries all around the world and their social and labour issues have thus moved up in the global policy-making agenda. Current topics for this grouping include poverty reduction through tourism; employment relationships in the media, culture, graphical and telecommunications sectors; older workers in the commerce sector; and private employment agencies in private services sectors. The ILO's work in these sectors involves significant cooperation with agencies such as the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the Universal Postal Union and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

- **Public services** grouping covers the following sectors:

- Health services
- Utilities (water, gas, electricity)
- Municipalities
- Public administration
- Police and firefighters

The public sector accounts for a very significant proportion of employment in all countries world wide. The ILO Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151), provides minimum standards and guidance for government employers and encourages policy-makers to take into account the interests of employees in order to minimize conflicts. The health services sector includes health service providers, health managers and support personnel – all workers whose primary actions enhance health. The ILO also collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO) to define national and workplace policy recommendations and to develop tools to improve the working conditions for all health workers.



- **Transport** grouping covers the following sectors:
 - Transport (air, road, rail)
 - Shipping, ports, fisheries, waterways

The adoption of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, and the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No.188), and its Recommendation, 2007 (No.199), have reconfirmed the importance of these sectors and the need to provide rights and protection of the workers in the industry. Targeted assistance is provided for the ratification and effective implementation of these sectoral Conventions through technical and advisory assistance, as well as through the development of guidelines on the inspection

of labour conditions on ships and fishing vessels, and training materials. Codes of practice on safety and health in ports and on security in ports have also been developed, as well as a number of working papers and studies on transport-related subjects. Cross-sectoral issues, involving a number of the above sectors and affecting the work of freight forwarders, shippers, marine insurance organizations and other stakeholders of the supply chain, are also part of the ILO's work programme.