

WORLD of WORK

the magazine of the ILO

SPECIAL 2013 ISSUE



International
Labour
Organization



MYANMAR
| TURNS A CORNER

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Welcome!

The Special 2013 issue of the *World of Work* magazine is packed full of articles reflecting the themes of this year's International Labour Conference (ILC).

The 102nd Session of the Conference sees in a new ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, and we talk with the DG about his vision for the organization: Being close to the constituents and listening to their needs is the way to make sure the work the ILO does is grounded in the realities of the world of work.

The other features look at some of these realities and the issues discussed at the Conference: ending child labour, promoting green and decent jobs, promoting social dialogue between governments, employers and workers, and responding to the challenge of “greying” societies.

ILO Conferences also reflect key junctures in history and the role the Organization played in these: the Great Depression, decolonization, the creation of Solidarność in Poland, the victory over apartheid in South Africa – and, last year, the introduction of a historic labour law in Myanmar.

World of Work magazine has travelled to Myanmar for the first time, and we have a special report on the achievements and the challenges in the country as it continues to make strides towards democratisation.

And you will also find the latest ILO publications and information about new features of the ILO website in this magazine.

I hope that you will enjoy reading about the ILO's work and the pressing issues that are the focus of this year's International Labour Conference.

Hans von Rohland

Editor, *World of Work* magazine

A conversation with Guy Ryder

Guy Ryder turns up for breakfast on the last day of his visit to Tokyo wearing an open-necked shirt (“I haven’t started working yet”) and in the mood for scrambled eggs, bacon and toast. It’s been an intensive week of meetings, field visits and social engagements first in Beijing then Tokyo and there is still one more leg – Delhi – before heading back to Geneva. Yet the ILO’s Director-General looks rested and has a broad smile.

Ryder’s first visit to China and Japan since taking office last October has gone very well with constituents in both countries welcoming the course he has set for the organization. The new DG feels the foundations laid by his predecessor, Juan Somavia, are a good basis to build what the organization needs to fulfil its potential. Central to this is the need to bring the ILO closer to governments, workers, and businesses.

“We are a values-led, an advocacy and a standard setting organization. But we are also a service organization and have to be responsive to what our constituents need [from us]”, he explains. “I do not think that sitting in Geneva and dreaming up or deciding in isolation what we think is the right course of action is going to work, there’s got to be physical proximity.”

Being close to the constituents and listening to their needs is the way to make sure the work the ILO does – the technical work, the analysis, the services it provides is grounded in a “real-world understanding” of the needs of businesses, of employers’ organizations, of workers and their organizations, and of ministries of labour.

“The work we do has to be high-quality but also relevant and useful. I want our constituents everywhere to feel that they can call on the ILO as a problem solver whenever they need the ILO in that capacity.”



© ILO/M. Crozet

This more agile role Ryder wants the ILO to play is no abstraction, as the reaction to the tragedy in Bangladesh vividly illustrates. Within days of the worst disaster in the garment industry – the collapse on 24 April of the Rana Plaza multi-storey factory building which killed more than 1,300 people and injured over two thousand – Ryder sent his deputy for field operations, Gilbert Hounbo, to Dhaka. The ILO worked with the Government, the employers and the workers to develop a plan of action. The plan includes a labour law reform package that, among other things, includes protection of the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as a series of measures to improve occupational safety and health and to strengthen inspection systems together with a mechanism for monitoring progress.

Soon after the ILO mission, global trade unions and retailers put together an accord on building and fire safety in Bangladesh and over 30 apparel brands have already committed to it. The ILO has not been involved in negotiating the agreement but is ready to support its implementation.

“The tragedy in Bangladesh underlined the need for the ILO to be able to demonstrate its relevance and usefulness in real time and we’ve shown, in very unfortunate circumstances, that the ILO can get on to the ground and address important and urgent issues in a very practical way, working with our constituents and with other actors, in this case the retail companies”, says Ryder.

But this galvanising approach is not without its critics, as Ryder acknowledges. “There are challenges to the organization from these rapidly-changing events and we will have discussions, sometimes quite difficult

THE FORCES TRANSFORMING THE WORLD OF WORK

The impact of demographic change

- By 2050, there will be only four persons of working age for every person over 65; in 2000, there were still nine. But there will be marked regional differences in demographic trends meaning that 44.5 million workers will still enter the global labour market in the next five years. The ILO will have to address these demographic and labour market challenges in five key areas within its mandate: job creation, social protection, migration, fragile and conflict-affected states and sustainable production processes.

The transition to environmental sustainability

- Environmental sustainability is a precondition for sustainable enterprises and jobs. The ILO will promote the considerable potential for creation of decent work associated with the transition to a low carbon, sustainable development path - trying to minimise and manage the inevitable dislocation associated with it. Social dialogue between governments, employers and workers is already proving to be a powerful means to achieve that sustainability.

The onward march of technology

- Some 200,000 industrial robots are coming into use each year and a total of 1.5 million is expected by 2015. Technological innovation will feed directly into the demand for skills in labour markets. Strengthening of the education and training systems and the provision of basic skills to all has to be not just a top priority but a shared one between governments, employers and workers.

Changing contours of poverty and prosperity

- Access to decent work is key to ending poverty. The ILO has won widespread support for that proposition, which needs to be a keystone of the post-2015 UN Development Agenda. Closely related to trends in poverty is the emergence of a global middle class which will also have implications for the world of work.

Growing inequality: a major challenge to social justice

- The good news of reduced poverty and a growing middle class – in parts of the world at least – coexist with deep concern about growing inequality within and between countries. Inequality will simply not be tolerated socially or economically. It has to be included into a distinct policy agenda that is central to the world of work, thus to the ILO.

Rebalancing, convergence, recovery

- The international community's objective of re-launching strong, balanced and sustainable growth which is rich in jobs, places the ILO at the centre of key policy debates including at the G20 and with the international financial institutions. There is an important opportunity here for the ILO to inject the decent work agenda into the dynamics of recovery.

The changing character of production and employment

- Conditions of employment are changing. Globalization of business activities is likely to open new opportunities for the ILO to address labour practices not only with individual countries – as we do now – but also with global supply chains. Discussions should go on within the ILO to reach a compromise on how we could interact more with private enterprises.

discussions, about the best and most appropriate way to position the ILO. But we have to decide on our response to what is really going on in the world of work, even when it's uncomfortable, even when it's difficult".

In his first report to the International Labour Conference, "Realities, renewal and tripartite commitment", Ryder is frank about some sensitive topics. These include the implications for the goal decent work for all when 'atypical' forms of employment are becoming the norm, the issue of constituents' representativeness, and the need to work with other actors in civil society while reserving the decision-making to the constituents ("it's governments with their democratic mandate and membership-based organizations that have the representative legitimacy to make decisions").

The ILO needs to build consensus and speak with authority on the key labour market policy issues of the day.

"The defence of legitimate interests is normal, and the divergent views that result from it are a normal part of life at the ILO. But if these views result in a long-term stand-off on matters which will be the subject of political decisions and action at the national level, then the risk for the ILO is that it will inevitably be seen as irrelevant in areas where it absolutely needs to be present", he argues. "We have to face up to the realities and renew the way we work to address those realities, and the only way we're going to get the job done is if all of our three constituents do give the type of commitment that we need to get the job done. The questions are difficult but the organization won't be well served by dodging them. We have to work out the answers together."

Re-positioning the ILO is not so much a choice as an imperative, if the organization is to respond to the profound crisis in the world of work, and the trends shaping it (*see box on page 5*).

Ryder also wants the ILO to work closer with sister agencies to help increase the coherence of the multilateral system. Back in April, Ryder and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim agreed on a joint programme of work. “There is growing convergence between the World Bank and the ILO when it comes to employment and jobs-related issues”, he says. As for the IMF, the plan is to take stock of the work done since the landmark joint conference in Oslo in 2010 and see how to move forward. “The goal is to have the international system moving in the same direction, working on [shared] objectives including decent work.”

Besides working at the high end of international policy-making, Ryder wants to reach out to all groups in civil society – the judiciary, parliamentarians, the media – and the general public, and enlist everyone’s support for the ambitious social change agenda he’s set for the ILO.

The new DG feels that the ILO’s profile could be higher and wants the organization to tap its full potential. “I want the ILO to have influence, to make a difference, I want us to weigh heavily in international policy arenas and work on the ground to change things that need to be changed.”

And he is encouraging the ILO’s constituents to seize the opportunity of the ILO’s centenary in 2019 not only to look back at achievements but to focus on the kind of “relevant, practical work” the ILO can do to make a difference. Ryder is proposing seven “Centenary Initiatives” starting with an in-depth reflection by a panel of world experts on the future of the world of work underpinned by the need to move to a sustainable economy (*see box on the right*).

Listening to Ryder’s passionate appeal to the Japanese Trade Union Confederation to help fellow workers in Bangladesh in their fight for safer workplaces, or his request to Chinese and Japanese ministers for help in pushing jobs as a G-20 priority and putting jobs and livelihoods at the centre of the global development goals that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals, it’s clear that he is convinced that the ILO has both a duty and the ability to make a difference in changing peoples’ lives.

As we are finishing breakfast just before the last engagements in Tokyo, I ask him what he’d be doing if he weren’t the Director-General of the ILO and had his pick of any job in the world. He looks surprised and, for the

first time, draws a blank – as though leading the ILO in these times of formidable challenges and extraordinary opportunity is all he’s ever wanted to do. (*Marcia Poole*)

ILO CENTENARY INITIATIVES

➤ **The Future of Work Initiative** to establish an Advisory Panel on the Future of Work whose report would be available for discussion at the 2019 Centenary International Labour Conference.

➤ **The Green Initiative** to give practical application to the decent work dimension of the transition to a low carbon, sustainable development path and to facilitate tripartite contribution to it.

➤ **The Women at Work Initiative** to survey the place and conditions of women in the world of work and engage tripartite constituents in concrete action to realize equality of opportunity and treatment.

➤ **The End to Poverty Initiative** to meet the urgent requirement for an adequate living wage for all who work including through employment and social protection components of the post 2015 development agenda.

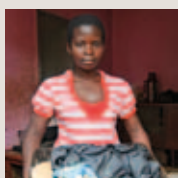
➤ **The Enterprises Initiative** to establish a platform for ILO engagement with enterprises which would contribute to their sustainability and to ILO goals.

➤ **The Standards Initiative** to consolidate tripartite consensus on an authoritative supervisory system and to enhance the relevance of international labour standards through a standards review mechanism.

➤ **The Governance Initiative** to complete reform of the ILO’s governance structures and to undertake the evaluation of the impact of the 2008 Declaration as set out in its final provisions, and to act on its findings.



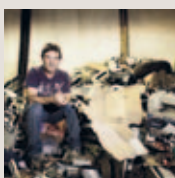
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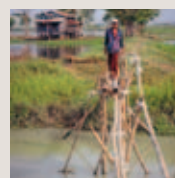
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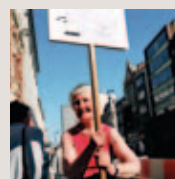
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MEDIA SHELF



Fixing the future of Malawi's child workers



There are some 215 million child labourers in the world and about a quarter of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. Most African countries have ratified the relevant ILO Conventions dealing with the elimination of child labour, but the problem prevails. Indeed the most recent ILO global estimates indicated that sub-Saharan Africa was the only region in which child labour was still increasing.

*Text by Hans von Rohland
Photos by Marcel Crozet*



In Malawi the numbers of child labourers fell by more than ten per cent between 2002 and 2006, but according to the ILO's latest estimates almost 30 per cent of children aged 5–15 are still trapped in child labour.

In most cases, it is poverty that forces children into child labour, robbing them of their childhood and putting their future at risk. But sometimes child workers' dreams do come true. This is the story of Pamela Maposah, an 18-year-old girl who works as a housemaid in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi.

Maposah has ten siblings. When her father died in 1996, she had to start working as a domestic worker since her mother alone could not support the family.

Maposah's employer has two children. By 6.45 in the morning Maposah has to drop them at school. On her way back, she buys food at the market and prepares lunch. She fetches the kids at 11.30 a.m. and feeds them. Then it's time to do the dishes, bathe the children, mop and sweep the house.





At 2 p.m. Maposah starts her second life, training to become a carpenter. Her dream is to someday have her own workshop and be able to employ other workers.

“She was the only girl interested in carpentry... She is very outspoken,” says Irene Umbra Zalira. Her organization, Youth Empowerment and Civic Education (YECE) has partnered with the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) – the SNAP Malawi project (*see box on page 14*).

The project has helped more than 5,500 children in Malawi. Some have been enrolled in schools; others, like Maposah, in vocational training activities.

SNAP has not only improved Maposah’s working conditions as a domestic worker, including a reduction of working hours and a contract negotiated with her employer. It has also given her and other child workers a voice through the Community Child Labour Committee (CCLC). The CCLC monitors working conditions and offers domestic workers a forum where they can speak out and share their problems.

According to Irene, the CCLC plays a key role in the success of the project. All actors work together addressing problems and finding solutions for working children.





VICE



IPEC

**INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR
(IPEC)
CONTRACT AGREEMENT AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE FOR YOUNG
EMPLOYEE(S) WITH EMPLOYERS**

(ELIMINATION OF DOMESTIC CHILD LABOUR IN LILONGWE DISTRICT)

Working conditions will be guided by this manual

*Malumula a ntchito adzakumalidwa kutiwa kutiwa ndi mwana wogwira
ntchito adlira kwana wabe wamulemka ntchito.*

*It is an express condition of your service that you provide the following information to
the employer:*
Muwoneke nyenye kutembidwa munda ichi:

Name	Patela Maposah
Age	18 yrs
Sex/Female(Masomuna/Mbazi)	Female
Age/Umudzi	Patela
T/A (Mfumu/Vakulu)	T/A Chanthunga
District/Boma	Patela
Name of employer/Dina la bwana	Mecy @Zimba
Place of work/Malo ogwira ntchito	Kawale II
Nature of work/Munda wa ntchito	Ja - nyumba
Position/Postho yake/ndi	Jo samala pa ulhamp
Starting from/Tiku koyandira ntchito	11 Feb 2011
School/Sukulu/Centre yomwe ranupita	Ja Kawale

“We know that if a young person goes straight to the employer and talks to him or her, he or she will take it badly. But if a chief, an important person in the community, talks to the employer, the latter will take it better. Whenever the chief speaks, people listen,” village chief Petro Kondodo explains.

“People employ children because they are cheap. A child has the right to education, and later to employment, but only after attaining the minimum legal age...Only then will children become productive citizens,” says Kondodo.

Maposah could not agree more. “I did not have a dream. I thought I would be a domestic worker forever,” she remembers. “Now I’m on my way to becoming a carpenter.”





ACTION AGAINST CHILD LABOUR IN MALAWI

RESULTS

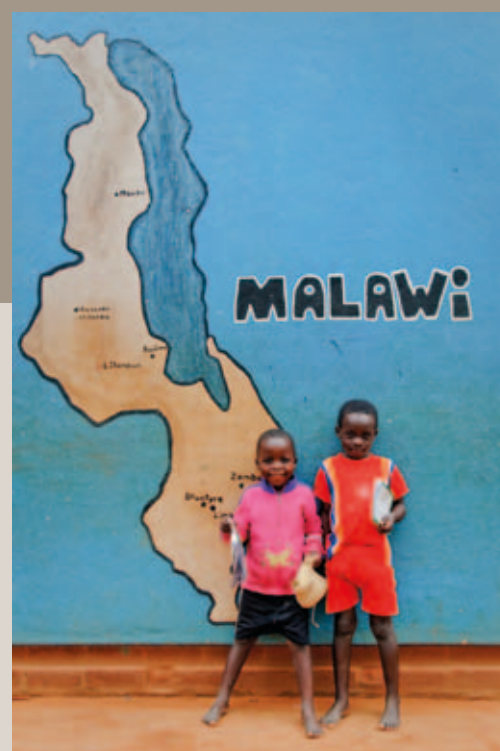
The ILO Project of Support to the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labour in Malawi (SNAP Malawi) supports efforts by the Government and by employers' and workers' organizations to implement the National Action Plan. Integrating child labour issues into social, economic and development policies, the action plan promotes universal basic education and develops a skilled labour force in an institutionalized manner. The Government's commitment to the elimination of child labour was demonstrated when in September 2012 the President of Malawi, the Rt Hon Joyce Banda, presided at the opening of the first-ever national conference on child labour, the largest event of its kind ever held.


The project involves local communities and promotes cooperation between government entities, employers' and workers' organizations, and civil society. This so-called convergence model supports the creation of Child-Labour-Free Zones through joint efforts by these partners.

SNAP has been implemented in four districts of Malawi: Lilongwe, Kasungu, Mzimba and Mulanje. The project provides services to vulnerable children, but also supports their parents and their communities. It sets up sustainable structures that will continue to monitor the situation and prevent children from falling into child labour in their respective villages.

As of February 2013, the project has achieved the following:

- In the four target districts, the foundations to create child-labour-free villages have been established, and a community child labour monitoring system is up and running.
- In Lilongwe, SNAP Malawi has developed a unique strategy on child domestic labour with the workers' organization MCTU to protect children from abuse and provide child domestic workers who are above the minimum age with work in a decent working environment.
- A total of 5,511 children have been withdrawn from child labour or prevented from entering child labour in the four districts.
- 319 children above the minimum age to work have completed vocational training and receive support to start their own business and find decent youth employment.
- 343 adults have benefited from income-generating activities and another 75 have been trained in business management.
- Eight Outreach Skills Centres have been established and training standards for carpentry, tailoring, brick laying, welding and other skills have been developed and implemented.
- Beneficiaries are followed by a child labour monitoring system.
- Studies on child labour have been conducted in three districts of Malawi.



A young woman with short, dark, braided hair is looking directly at the camera. She is holding a large, white, rectangular piece of paper with both hands. The paper has handwritten text in black ink. In the foreground, a vintage-style black and gold sewing machine is visible on a wooden surface. The machine has ornate gold-colored patterns and a central emblem. To the right of the sewing machine, there is a piece of white fabric. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

I AM OUT OF
CHILD LABOUR
NOW I AM A
TAILOR

Turning “wasted lives” into green and decent ones



In a world faced with growing amounts of waste, more and better recycling is crucial to reduce pressure on natural resources, the environment and public health. It also means that millions of new jobs are and will continue to be created. Making sure they are both green and decent is a key part of the environmental challenge.

By Severino Goes and Hans von Rohland

In his 2004 book *Wasted Lives*, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls rubbish collectors “the unsung heroes of modernity”, arguing that modern consumption not only produces material waste, but also “human waste”.

Ronei Alves da Silva is one of Bauman’s heroes. He started to work as a waste-picker at the age of 5 in his hometown, Brasilia. By the time he was 28 he had finished only fifth grade and had spent 23 long years first as a child labourer and then unemployed.

His life started to change the day he joined a waste-

picker cooperative. Today, this 38-year-old Brazilian is president of the Central Recycling Cooperative in Brasilia and holds a university law degree.

Da Silva’s story is testimony to his personal hard work, but also to the huge changes that the waste-picking profession has undergone over the past decade in Brazil.

His cooperative brings together 25 associations employing 4,000 people in local garbage collection. Countrywide, some 600,000 people make a living from garbage collection.

HOW DID THIS CHANGE HAPPEN?

In 2002, the Ministry of Labour officially recognized the profession of waste-pickers. For Da Silva this was an important first step, but one which has not necessarily changed working conditions.



Ronei Alves
da Silva

“It’s an ongoing process, but to be considered as a professional category is a major step towards change,” he says.

Now, for example, waste-pickers, or at least some of them, have social security, better working conditions and, last but not least, a

“voice”. Being recognized as a profession also means that waste-pickers and the cooperatives representing them are in a stronger position to negotiate with clients.

Brazil has introduced a series of other changes in the sector over the last decade.

These include promoting enterprise development, in particular the establishment of associations and cooperatives, and contracts at the municipal level; introducing modern recycling methods and facilities (sorting stations); developing skills and occupational safety and health precautions among workers; and implementing measures to prevent and discourage child labour.

These measures have triggered large-scale improvements not only in recycling efficiency, but also in working conditions and incomes.

The income of the approximately 60,000 members of recycling cooperatives is three to five times higher than that of unorganized waste-pickers. What’s more, all workers with registered contracts must make contributions to social security. These contributions give them access to social security benefits which are the same as for other formal sector workers in Brazil.

The Brazilian poverty eradication strategy “Brazil without Misery” (*Brasil Sem Miséria*), launched by President Rousseff in June 2011, aims to scale this up and formalize a further 250,000 waste-pickers in addition to the over 60,000 already organized.

Today, Brazil has the world’s largest national waste-pickers’ movement.

HOW TO PROMOTE GREEN AND DECENT JOBS

Citing examples from around the globe, a report to the 2013 International Labour Conference highlights a series of promising approaches in key economic sectors to promote green and decent jobs:

- **Agriculture:** enabling small-scale producers to adopt more productive and environmentally and socially sustainable production methods
- **Forestry:** stopping deforestation, rehabilitating degraded forests and extending sustainable forest management through support for sustainable forest enterprises
- **Fisheries:** promoting sustainable levels of catch in the fishing sector by providing income replacement during unemployment and/or access to alternative income opportunities
- **Energy:** improved energy efficiency, renewable energy and access to clean energy for all through regulation, price signals, enterprise development and access to finance, supported by skills upgrading
- **Resource-intensive industries:** stimulating greening of these industries to substantially reduce pollution, energy and resource consumption through regulation, incentives and labour management cooperation in factories
- **Waste management and recycling:** increasing recycling and upgrading informal waste management through organization of informal recycling workers, service contracts, technical and business skills development
- **Buildings:** tapping the largest potential for energy efficiency gains by adopting high building standards for new construction, and stimulating renovation of existing building infrastructure
- **Transport:** shifting to energy-efficient vehicles and modes of transport, in particular public transport

Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs, Report V, International Labour Conference, 102nd Session, Geneva, 2013.

“We have to considerably improve the quality of many of the over 20 million jobs in global waste management and recycling. It is the only way to make sure that these jobs bring economic, social and environmental benefits to all.”

Peter Poschen

AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



André Vilhena

André Vilhena heads a non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of recycling and integrated waste management. This Executive Director of Business Commitment to Recycling (CEMPRE) believes that recycling in

Brazil has become an example for developing countries – not only by the amount of waste collected, but also as a model for the social inclusion of low-income families.

“Some 600,000 jobs have been created in the sector, but we still have to move forward on issues such as the organization of more waste-picker cooperatives, improving efficiency and security,” he says.

“More waste-pickers should be organized in cooperatives. Although their work is officially recognized now, many of them are still independent workers. The organization in cooperatives gives them a voice and stronger bargaining power,” he adds.

Vilhena also says that safety and health at work is still an issue. Public authorities should improve working conditions, for example by creating collecting points.

CEMPRE is working with 38 large companies, including Dell, Walmart, Nestle, McDonald’s and Coca-Cola.

Walmart, for example, has adopted policies to reduce packaging by 5 per cent across the supply chain. The consumption of plastic bags by consumers is to be cut by 50 per cent by the end of this year.

McDonald’s has built the first ecological restaurant in Latin America in Bertioga, Brazil. The restaurant separates garbage by categories (metal, plastic, glass, non-recyclable rubbish and styrofoam) and stores it in bays. After a centralized screening process the waste is directly sent to recycling companies.

HUGE JOBS POTENTIAL

According to the ILO report to the 2013 International Labour Conference, the waste management and recycling industry is already a significant employer worldwide.

An estimated four million workers are employed in the formal sector, with another 15–20 million estimated to be working as informal waste-pickers in developing countries.

Peter Poschen, the head of the ILO’s Job Creation and Enterprise Development Department, sees a huge job creation potential in a world faced with escalating volumes of waste.

But he also sees the challenges.

“The sector will create new employment, but the biggest challenge is upgrading existing informal to formal employment. This will allow the industry to cope with more complex recycling processes, offer workers secure jobs with acceptable income levels, and allow them to protect themselves, their communities and the environment from

traditional and new hazards such as electronic waste,” Poschen says.

“Recycling will only become a truly green activity when it is formalized,” he concludes.



MYANMAR

turns a corner

SPECIAL REPORT

Text by Marcia Poole

Photos by Marcel Crozet

The changes in Myanmar since the 2010 elections have been dramatic. The military-turned-civilian government that came to power then has defied sceptics and confounded critics with the breadth and pace of reform in the country. While it is still relatively early days, with some serious issues yet to be resolved, Myanmar's citizens are enjoying freedoms they have been denied for the last quarter of a century.

World of Work magazine travels to the “Golden Land” for a first-hand account of the progress so far – and the challenges that remain – as Myanmar turns a corner on the road towards democratization.



A chequered journey

The relationship between Myanmar (also known as Burma) and the ILO has been unique in the organization's 95-year history. One of the world's most isolated countries, ruled until not long ago by a repressive military regime shunned by most of the international community, Myanmar had been persistently criticized by the ILO and others for its state-approved use of forced labour. Yet it allowed the ILO unprecedented access to the country, including the establishment of a complaints mechanism that led to victims of forced labour – including under-age recruitment into the military – being freed and officials prosecuted.

This remarkable journey is a powerful illustration of what principled and committed engagement can achieve in support of brave citizens and pragmatic leaders. It's also a tale of perseverance in the face of frustration, setbacks and at times perilously tense relations.

The ILO has been working with Myanmar ever since the first serious allegations of use of forced labour emerged in the late 1980s.

Reports by human rights groups, based on interviews with Burmese refugees fleeing the army's offensives against ethnic-minority armed groups, described major human rights violations, including the widespread use of forced labour, notably in infrastructure construction projects and in the use of civilians as porters for the army.

Three years later, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) submitted detailed allegations to the ILO.

By 1997, after using different mechanisms to get the Government to respond to the allegations, the ILO's Governing Body concluded that there was plenty of evidence that the State used forced labour as a matter of deliberate policy. As a result, it established a Commission of Inquiry to examine whether Myanmar was complying with its obligations under the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), which Myanmar ratified in 1955. The Commission found that there was "abundant evidence" that the authorities made "pervasive use" of forced labour. It made a series of recommendations and the ILO offered technical assistance to the Government to implement the recommendations.

In the face of the Government's failure to act on the recommendations of the Commission, the ILO



invoked – for the first time in its history – article 33 of the ILO Constitution. Article 33 allows the Governing Body to recommend to member States whatever action, including trade sanctions, it may deem necessary to ensure compliance with the recommendations of a Commission of Inquiry.

At first, there were signs that the Government was prepared to take positive action and there was even a first ILO mission to Myanmar in May 2000 to discuss the situation. But the mission couldn't persuade the authorities to take any concrete measures before the International



Labour Conference (ILC) met the following month. In June 2000, the Conference voted to approve article 33 measures.

Since then the ILO has been deeply engaged in eliminating forced labour in Myanmar. The organization was allowed to open a liaison office in the country in May 2002 to monitor the situation, provide technical assistance and – crucially – with the supplementary understanding in February 2007, to receive and investigate complaints of forced labour. It was also given freedom of movement (which continues to this day, with the ILO being able to travel widely across the country while other international organizations, including sister UN agencies, are required to obtain permission which is not always granted).

There have been successes, including the first-ever case of officials being prosecuted and imprisoned for imposing forced labour (2004).

But there also have been setbacks, especially in 2005, which the ILO's first liaison officer in Myanmar, Richard Horsey, described as the ILO's "*annus horribilis*" when he himself suffered death threats.



Aung San Suu Kyi

Since the 2010 elections the pace of progress has stepped up. Last year in particular, the new Government signed an agreement to eradicate all forms of forced labour in the country by 2015; ILO officials travelled to Myanmar to meet the senior leadership; a historic law allowing for freedom of association and collective bargaining was passed; the opposition leader and Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi addressed the International Labour Conference; and the ILC voted to suspend some restrictions on the country and consider a permanent lifting of article 33 measures during this year's conference. Over the next pages we look at the changes taking place in Myanmar, and how the ILO has helped bring them about.

The state of rights

“There’s progress but there’s still oppression: there have been changes at the central level but not at the grassroots level.”

When you first meet the petite, pretty and poised lady, wearing the traditional *tamein* (Burmese ladies’ dress) and with cheeks decorated with yellow *tanaka* paste, you could be forgiven for not knowing you’re in the presence of a little piece of Myanmar history.

In 2004, Su Su Nwe came to the ILO office in Yangon and explained that her village council was forcing her, along with other villagers, to build, by hand, a road to a nearby village. After discussing the case with the ILO liaison officer, Su Su Nwe decided to file a complaint with her local court. Just under a year later, she, along with other villagers who had since also lodged complaints, won a surprising legal victory. The court found in their favour and for the first time, officials were found guilty of imposing forced labour illegally and sent to prison.



Su Su Nwe

Nine years on, Su Su Nwe is a community activist who travels around the country to help people understand, and exercise, their rights.

She says the situation has improved in recent years but there are still problems, especially at the local authority level. “For example, there is one case where villagers were tricked with promises of salaries of 10,000 kyats a day for men, and 8,000 for women (about US\$11 and 8.80 respectively). So they left their village, but when they got to the factory they were only given less than 2,000 kyats (about US\$2.20) and told they couldn’t leave,” she explains. She brought the case to the ILO and, after the ILO intervened, the workers were free to leave the factory.

Su Su Nwe is now working on another case, in the Tanintharyi region, where she claims that a worker died of malaria because he was not given proper treatment. She wants to sue the company.

Asked if she fears retaliation, Su Su Nwe says that the Government knows that she works with the ILO and this gives her protection. She is also adamant that the ILO has played a key role in the process and needs to continue working with the Government to ensure that the changes are permanent and more progress is made.

“There’s been real change when it comes to forced and child labour. It now needs to be broadened to land confiscation and workers’ rights.”

U Than Soe is 53 years old, and has been a farmer since he was 16. He says a farmer’s life has always been hard in Myanmar.

Back in the days of General Ne Win, farmers were told to plant only crops designated by the Government (which took a quota). In more recent years, land was confiscated without compensation to the farmers.

In 2007, farmland in his village was confiscated for the establishment of a sugar plant under the Defence Ministry. Two years later U Than Soe was imprisoned for working on his own land and sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison. The ILO intervened and he was released after serving three months. As for the land confiscated in 2007, last year the Government allowed farmers to register their land and work on it (although they were paid no compensation for the five years the land had remained under confiscation).



U Than Soe

U Than Soe is now a facilitator, working with farmers and workers and with the ILO. His latest case deals with farmers who have been allowed to work on their land but not to register it.

Like Su Su Nwe, he feels the problem lies in the disconnect between

the decisions of the central Government and the actions of local authorities. “The central Government and parliament enact laws but local authorities don’t implement them,” he explains. “At the township level, they [sometimes] ignore the law, and at the village administrator level they are [often] not aware of it.”

But U Than Soe feels that there can be more progress especially with the ILO’s continued involvement. The role of the ILO “is very important to farmers and workers”, he says. “They feel that only by working together with the ILO can they achieve change.”

Youth, reclaimed

The nineteen young men have been sitting patiently for over an hour. Some doze off in the afternoon heat, some play with their mobile phones and others fiddle with their hair, dyed in blond colours or spiked with gel. All are dressed in jeans, trousers and t-shirts rather than the longyi traditionally worn by Myanmar men. They could be high-school students waiting for their next class. Except that they have lived through experiences that no child, high-school student or otherwise, should ever have to go through – they are all former child soldiers, rescued from the army with the help of the ILO.

They were between 11 and 16 years old when they were recruited; some spent only a few months in the army, but two of them served for six years before they were rescued.

Some are still waiting for their discharge papers – which can take up to three years, a deliberate delay, they claim. The ILO gives them a protection letter in the meantime but, as of one of them explains, he feels insecure because without the discharge papers he could be arrested for desertion.

They also say that the army has deliberately withheld their wages and savings (they got paid the same as older soldiers while in service) as a “grudge” due to the ILO’s involvement in their cases.

While half of the group have odd or informal jobs such as a roadside seller or a welder, all say it’s difficult for them to get regular jobs. The youth unemployment rate in Myanmar is high and on top of this the former child soldiers often lack identity papers due to their under-age recruitment. This makes

it even more difficult for them to get a job. And they say they don’t get any help from the army, although NGOs such as Save the Children help them with training and seed money for micro-businesses.

The former child soldiers say that children are still being recruited into the army and, once they are rescued, they still face problems such as waiting several years for their discharge papers or not being able to get a job. They say more progress is needed, and they all ask for the ILO to put pressure on the central Government so that the

central Government will in turn put pressure on the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar military) to stop child recruitment for good.

But as they sit cross-legged on the floor and giggle while talking of their plans and dreams, from setting up poultry farms to being computer technicians and entrepreneurs, it’s clear that they have managed to reclaim their most precious asset – their lives as ordinary young people.



On the front line

Daw Soe Soe Hla is an ILO case worker, working on the cases of child soldiers. We catch, through a closed glass door, a glimpse of an interview she is conducting. She is listening intently and is busy taking notes. But every now and then she looks up from her notepad and gives the complainant encouraging nods.

She has an intrinsic understanding of what the young man sitting opposite her must be feeling. When Daw Soe Soe Hla's nephew was 15 years old, he was forcibly recruited into the army. He managed to run away shortly afterwards, only to be caught and sentenced to seven years' hard labour for deserting the army.

In one of her visits to the hard labour camp to see her nephew, one of his jailers found a way of telling her that she should contact the ILO as the only agency able to help her nephew. This she did and, following the ILO's involvement in the case, her nephew was released.

Now Daw Soe Soe Hla helps other families and



their children, often accompanying parents too afraid to approach their local regiments to make enquiries about their missing sons.

She takes a break from her desk on the upper floor of the ILO's office in Yangon and greets us downstairs with a broad smile on her

face. "There are still many cases of child recruitment," she says. "It's often because the children are poor and need to work, and most are tricked into the army." [Ed. These are cases of under-age rather than forced recruitment].

But Daw Soe Soe Hla says the situation is getting better and in "eight out of ten cases" she brings the cases to the local army regiments and the children are returned to their families.



U Phyo Sithu

U Phyo Sithu is another ILO case worker with direct experience of what those who approach him have been through. In May 2003 he himself was recruited into the army. U Phyo Sithu was only 13 years old. He and other older boys broke free, but during their escape some soldiers were fatally shot. While the older boys fled across the border, they told U Phyo Sithu to stay behind and cut off the telephone lines. He was caught and sentenced to death in 2004 but the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

While in prison U Phyo Sithu met a political prisoner who, once released, helped him and took his case to the ILO.

Once free, U Phyo Sithu started working as a volunteer facilitator with the ILO. This year, he joined the ILO staff and has gone back to Sagaing – the region where he both served in the military and served his prison sentence – to support forced labour victims including under-age recruits.

U Phyo Sithu says the main challenge these days is at the local level, where officials aren't aware of the legislation or of the ILO. But there is one big difference: "The victims are no longer afraid," explains U Phyo Sithu. "Now, they are confident." Because of the ILO's involvement, he says, they will talk [about their cases] even in front of military officers.



U Zaw Htay

Working with the ILO can also bring risks. U Zaw Htay works on cases of child soldiers, land confiscation and human trafficking. Back in 2004, when he was still a voluntary facilitator, he heard of case in which a young man had allegedly died as a result of forced labour and that the Government was allegedly trying to cover it up. When U Zaw Htay contacted the ILO, he was arrested for “giving false information” to the organization.

A few years later he was again arrested, this time for “giving false information” relating to a case in which

farmers refusing to undertake forced labour had their land confiscated. When he took pictures of his own land that had been confiscated by the army he was accused of “leaking confidential information”. The ILO negotiated his release on both occasions.

U Zaw Htay says there are still cases of land confiscation. “In some cases, the authorities have the same attitude [as before],” he says, adding that some officials see him as the enemy. “But in other cases, it’s a lot easier, the response of the Government is getting better.”



A new beginning

In early May 2008, cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar causing more than 130,000 deaths in the country's reportedly worst-ever natural disaster. In the Irrawaddy delta region, in addition to the huge loss of life, an estimated 95 per cent of houses were destroyed. The ILO teamed up with other UN agencies to help communities recover from the tragedy. In 2009, with funding from the United Kingdom, it built over 80 kilometres of footpaths and some 50 footbridges linking several of the most affected villages, as well over 20 jetties.

The footpaths, footbridges and jetties enabled the villages not only to recover but also to interact with one another, something that had not been possible before the disaster because of their isolated location.

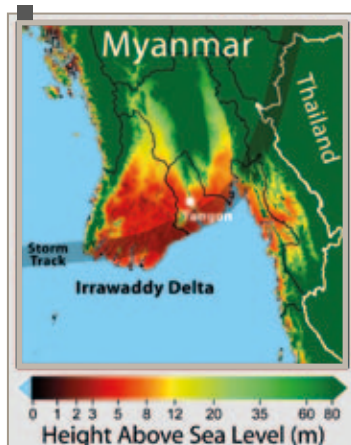
The project employed over seven thousand people and showed that it is possible to undertake infrastructure building works without recourse to forced labour. It also helped raise awareness of international labour standards, provided vocational training to villagers and empowered

the communities to make decisions about issues that affected them.

Four years on, the local economy is flourishing with trade within and between the communities, children attending primary and secondary education, and villagers having easy access to primary healthcare.

Now villagers trained by the ILO during the 2009 project are building new footpaths in the area.

Disaster Area Topography





For more on this story, including photos and interviews with the villagers, go to the newsroom section at www.ilo.org/newsroom.

Getting down to business

Workers and employers get organized



In 2007, five young men held a meeting on May Day in Yangon. They were arrested and sentenced to between 25 and 27 years in prison. They were released as a result of the changes being introduced in the country and, over the past year since the introduction of the Labour Organization Law, year these same young men have helped set up some of the 500 labour organizations across the country.

On May Day this year, several of these unions held rallies across Yangon and elsewhere. In the largest rally, hundreds of young people mingled with veteran organizers and representatives of the international trade union movement under a sunny, cloudless blue sky, despite the humid heat that precedes the monsoon season. They ate, sang and watched a show of traditional Myanmar music and dance.

Just hours earlier, an official May Day celebration was held in the same conference hall where representatives from the 500 labour organizations had assembled during the previous two days to discuss – for the first time in Myanmar’s history – issues such as collective bargaining and occupational safety and health.

The worker representatives invited to the May Day celebration were greeted by Myanmar’s Labour Minister U Maung Myint, who delivered a message from President Thein Sein. Two days earlier, the Deputy Labour Minister U Myint Thein had told the delegates to the “Building a New Myanmar” conference that the newly-formed organizations, unlike those that had existed in the past, would be able to set their own agenda.

And the workers started right away, voting to select their representative to the 2013 International Labour Conference (ILC) from over 100 nominations.

“It’s a great responsibility to represent the workers of Myanmar [at the ILC],” said the elected representative, Daw Than Than Htay. “The farmers and workers have many needs in the workplace and in their daily lives. I’ll

travel the country to talk with them and find out about their situation so that I can convey their message to the Conference.”

For the president of the RUMFCCI (Myanmar’s Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries) U Win Maung, the employers too need to get organized, “not to confront labour organization but to work better together”. U Win Maung says the RUMFCCI is working to promote a social protection floor and a decent

workplace for their workers. They are also developing a business charter on a discrimination-free workplace, including with regard to HIV/AIDS. “We are working with members to promote a discrimination-free culture,” he says.

While the changes in freedom of association have been dramatic, some challenges remain. ILO Deputy Director-General Greg Vines says



that there are some weaknesses in both the Labour Organization Law and its enforcement. “It’s important that the Government, employers and labour organizations continue to work together to ensure that both the Law and its practice fully comply with the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and that workers are protected against dismissal and other discrimination for being involved in labour organization activities,” he adds. But they should be proud of the “very good start” that they have made.

What's next

As this special report has shown, progress in Myanmar in recent years and especially since the elections has been enormous and has surprised everyone, from the international community to the regime's hardened critics. And yet, perhaps reflecting the devastating consequences of the years of isolation coupled with the politics and policies of the military regime from 1988 until recently, much remains to be done and the challenges are formidable.

For a start, the changes in political and civil liberties that the central Government has brought about, and the laws passed by parliament, have yet to percolate through all layers of authority right down to village level.

And the newly-gained freedoms have not been accompanied by economic progress. There is a new affluence in Yangon, with trendy apartment blocks built, new and reconditioned cars imported from Japan and elsewhere choking the streets in traffic, and billboards everywhere advertising the latest mobile phones and tablets. But just a few kilometres outside the city, the lack of development and the poverty are striking.

Workers, including many women and quite a few children, are still constructing buildings and paving roads with little more than their bare hands.

Shacks made of straw and wood house entire families, and children play next to stagnant puddles alongside chickens and pigs. Further in the countryside, living conditions are even more basic.

The media are free but people say they still listen to international radio stations such as the BBC and Voice of America for news. Some say that, after all these years and false dawns in the past, they continue to be very cautious about what they say and do as they wait to see if the democratization will truly take hold.

And the inter-ethnic violence that started between Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state last year has now spread to other areas, including the outskirts of Yangon.



Steve Marshall

The peace process is very fragile with at least half of the ethnic groups clinging to demands for autonomy in their states, something that the Government is not comfortable with.

As for civil society, people are still learning how to exercise the rights that they have been given. Demonstrations and industrial action are not always peaceful; privately-owned papers routinely print libellous comments.

Some within the country's senior leadership are not necessarily against reform but are concerned with the erosion of discipline in society.

Last but not least, the elections scheduled for 2015 are eagerly awaited by many,

as is the decision on whether opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi will be allowed to run for President.

Faced with such a complex scenario, the ILO's liaison officer in Myanmar for the past six years, Steve Marshall, remains optimistic.

"The ILO has to work with the Government, with the employers and the workers and with the other players to lock in the change," he says, adding that the organization needs to focus on helping develop the policy framework, on the application of the law and on accountability.

Above all, the people must be empowered, including through economic development and decent work. "We have to make sure that people are aware of their rights and that they have the capacity and the confidence to exercise them responsibly because, ultimately, they are the ones who can ensure the success of the democratization process."

The lives and faces



of Myanmar



NEW FEATURES *of the* **ILO** website

The media landscape is changing fast and the ILO wants to make full use of digital platforms to serve our existing audiences better and reach new ones, including young women and men.

We hope that the revamped ILO public website (www.ilo.org) with its new features will help us increase the impact of the ILO's news and information offer.



The ILO Newsroom is a service that provides daily news, views and analysis from the world of work.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Go to: <http://www.ilo.org/newsroom>



The Institutional activities section of the ILO website offers the latest on the ILO's work, including its reform process, projects, partnerships and events.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Go to: <http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/activities>

Work in Progress is a blog where ILO experts share insights about the world of work and the state of the global economy.

Read and let us know what you think at: www.iloblog.org

You can also join, follow or connect with us:



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To find out how you can take action and have your say in the newest ILO campaigns, go to <http://www.ilo.org> and check out the **get involved section**.

ARTWORKS



"When we see people's rights under threat, we feel that we need to work with artists even closer than before, to draw attention to the plight of all these women, men and children, and to inspire others to act."

Guy Ryder, Director-General

Launched in October 2012, the ILO ArtWorks Programme brings together the ILO and artists committed to promoting fundamental rights in the world of work.

The programme focuses on taking action against forced labour and child labour and puts the spotlight on other ILO key areas such as green jobs for youth.

END SLAVERY NOW!

More than 20 million women, men and children are trapped in slavery all over the world. Prominent artists, athletes and activists are teaming up with the ILO to End Slavery Now and so can you.
Every action counts!

More information: www.ilo.org/artworks



A marriage *of* CONVENIENCE

Social dialogue has been ingrained in Sweden's labour market system for the last forty-five years and has resulted in the management of conflict and fewer labour disputes than in other countries. Rosalind Yarde discovers that avoiding confrontation is far from being a "soft option".

By Rosalind Yarde

There are very few countries in the world where employers express concern about the declining numbers of workers joining unions.

However, in Sweden, where unions participate in workplace decision-making, both sides need each other to be strong for the system to work, says Sverker Rudeberg, the collective bargaining coordinator at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises.

He says he is worried about the decreasing numbers of unionized blue collar workers – those in mainly manual jobs.

"The system is based on the legitimacy of the trade unions. We cannot do business if they are regarded as irrelevant by the workers. Otherwise, we would have to adapt. It's like an irreversible marriage. You have to learn to love the one you're with."

In the heyday of the 1990s, union membership in Sweden stood at more than 80 per cent. These days it is around 68 per cent – still one of the highest levels in industrialized countries.

Membership of employers' organizations is even higher – around 88 per cent of employers in the private sector and 100 per cent in the public sector belong to an organized group.

Johan Jarvklo, chairman of the IFMetall Union branch at the truck manufacturer Scania, also stresses that

strength is vital to reaching consensus. He likens it to a nuclear war scenario.

"Our labour relations are based on power. The employers realize that we can withdraw our labour and, of course, they can shut us out of the workplace. So in the end no-one has anything to gain. In

Sweden we don't need to strike to get to the negotiating table, but the power is there if we need it. It's more like the Cold War situation. Everyone has a nuke but doesn't want to use it."

INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

The current system in Sweden is based the law of "co-determination" passed in 1976 – which promotes employee participation in decision-making on employment and working conditions. Keth Thapper, national officer and international secretary of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, believes the low level of strikes is due in part to social dialogue.

"The system functions well. It has been going for decades. It's based on the independence of the social partners, who deal with everything to do with the labour



market. The collective bargaining system is entrenched in that. This has been going on since the 1970s, not just in the blue-collar sector but also in the other national sectors such as the academics and professional workers. They have the same system. The Government stays out of the dialogue and doesn't interfere."

Swedish industry is highly dependent on exports. The employers believe that their system gives Sweden "a competitive advantage in comparison to other countries because restructuring is accepted in Sweden. The priority is getting back to work. We don't have riots or demos where the trade unions oppose restructuring," says Rudeberg.

At Scania, for instance, the IFMetall union agreed to a package of redundancies and "time banking" at the height of the economic crisis, whereby employees work reduced hours which they "pay back" when demand picks up.

Over the years, productivity has also improved at Scania, due in part to agreements between unions and employers.

TRIPARTISM AND CRISIS



Stefan Hult

Photo: ©Nadja Ben Ammar/
Government Offices of Sweden

While the Government stays out of collective bargaining and other issues directly affecting the workplace, it does take part in tripartite discussions on wider issues such as labour market policy and job creation.

Stefan Hult, Director-General for planning at the Ministry of

Employment, says his Government, even though it is centre-right, believes social dialogue is important.

"Labour market discussions are very much influenced by the social partners. It is our tradition. We don't do anything without consulting, listening to and asking our social partners. We don't always do what they want and they don't always agree but we do dialogue."

Research has shown that tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining are mutually supportive. Where collective bargaining does not exist, tripartism rarely functions.

And with Sweden experiencing high levels of youth unemployment – currently around 25 per cent – the need for tripartite social dialogue to help find solutions to the problem has been recognized by government, says Hult.

"We are working together to try to tackle youth unemployment. Ministers are having all kinds of levels of discussions with our social partners on how to get young people into a job and how to give them some kind of education or job training. Other EU countries have schemes with apprenticeships. We don't have that but we want to have something like that. Hopefully we will get some sort of agreement with our social partners."

The "Swedish model" is by no means perfect. As this article was being prepared, two separate strike threats were narrowly averted. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation questions the current Government's commitment to social dialogue. Thapper says the Government has not involved its social partners enough, particularly during this economic crisis.

Rudeberg of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprises also says that tripartite dialogue does not work as well as it could.

However, with several countries, such as Spain and Greece, rolling back collective bargaining agreements in response to the crisis, Sweden's "marriage of convenience" seems a fairy-tale romance in comparison.

An ILO report, *Social dialogue: Recurrent discussion on social dialogue under the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, 2013, will be discussed at the International Labour Conference in June 2013. The report calls for:

- Social dialogue to be safeguarded in times of crisis;
- Strengthening of social dialogue within dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms;
- More sectors, enterprises and workers to be included in social dialogue mechanisms;
- Social dialogue to be improved in the context of globalization and global supply chains; and
- Policy coherence on social dialogue across international institutions and governments.

Responding to the DEMOGRAPHIC challenge



“It is important to take a life-cycle approach that promotes full and productive employment throughout the working life from youth to old age.”

Azita Berar Awad

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As populations age around the world, governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations are looking to ways to meet the challenge posed by fast-changing demographics. In advanced economies, striking a balance between ensuring employment for workers of all ages and providing sufficient social protection coverage for the unemployed, sick and retired is proving to be key.

By Adam Bowers

There will be more people over 60 than children under 10 globally by 2030. While healthier and longer-living populations are cause for celebration, declining fertility rates and ageing populations have potentially significant implications for economic growth and labour markets.

The slow pace of recovery from the financial crisis in advanced economies has accentuated the challenges posed by demographic change. Job opportunities are scant, and persistent high unemployment rates reduce contributions to – but increase demand on – social security systems, which are under additional pressure from spending cuts in some countries.

Youth and people over 50 years old tend to feel the brunt of economic crises. Very often they are the first to lose their jobs and the last ones to re-enter the labour

market. A new ILO report – *Employment and social protection in the new demographic context* – finds that older workers in particular are affected by long-term unemployment.

Brian Cody, from Ipswich, Massachusetts in the United States, is 60 and looking for work. He had always been able to find employment in the past, but since losing his job as a marketing director at the height of the economic crisis in 2008 he has been unemployed.

“I’ve been unable to find any type of full-time employment at salaries not even half what I used to earn,” Cody says.

The most difficult part of being unemployed, he says, is convincing others that he still has something to contribute to an employer, the economy, and society in general.

PROMOTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER WORKERS

Initiatives to promote employment of older workers are increasingly on the policy agenda.

In Germany, the Government has launched a national programme called 50plus, designed to encourage retention and employment of older workers.

The initiative includes job application and communication skills training, internships and wage subsidies. In 2011, the programme helped more than 200,000 out of 550,000 older long-term unemployed people to be “re-activated” into the labour market.

In the United Kingdom, over a quarter of the staff working at B&Q, a “do it yourself” superstore chain, are over 50 years old. The company, part of the Kingfisher retail group, says it sees real benefits from retaining and hiring older workers.

“Older workers have greater life experience, which means they can pass on their knowledge and skills to customers and younger members of staff,” a B&Q spokesperson says.

While efforts to ensure employment opportunities for all people of pre-retirement age are broadly welcomed, there is concern for those who have to work into later life to supplement their income, or who cannot find work. The ILO report suggests that there is a need to strike a balance, with “adequate measures to promote productive employment among older persons willing to work and sufficient social protection for those either unemployed or retired”.



SUSTAINING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

Ensuring that social protection systems continue to provide for populations in a new demographic context is a major challenge.

Some countries in Europe have raised, or are considering raising, their state pension age. According to the UK Department of Work and Pensions, if everyone worked a year longer in the UK, real gross domestic product (GDP) could increase by around 1 per cent (about £14 billion).

The UK Trades Union Congress (TUC) is concerned however that “accelerating the rise in the state pension age will simply push more people into poverty”.

“We will end up with a new limbo zone for people in their mid-60s who are too young for a pension, but too old to have any realistic chance of a job”, TUC General-Secretary Frances Barber has said.

A LIFE-CYCLE APPROACH

The ILO report recommends a holistic response to the demographic challenge. Such a response would promote job opportunities for younger and older people alike and treat social protection as an investment in human capital rather than a cost. Employment strengthens the prospects for growth and social protection, and vice versa, the report says.

“It is important to take a life-cycle approach that promotes full and productive employment throughout the working life from youth to old age, together with the extension of financially sustainable social protection to all population groups”, says Azita Berar Awad, Director of the ILO Employment Policy Department.

In Sweden, for example, youth employment guarantee schemes have improved employment rates for young people and thereby increased pension contributions, while efforts have also been made to broaden the share of older people in the working population.

Meanwhile a robust social protection system includes a guaranteed minimum pension for those with low or no income.

The report also highlights examples of companies with comprehensive approaches, such as German specialty chemicals company LANXESS. As part of its XCare demography program, the company offers various measures to support its employees in all phases of their working life. For example LANXESS has introduced a long-term account through which employees can convert vacation days and variable compensation components into time and money. Employees can use this “credit” to tailor their transition into retirement. The company has also launched a program enabling experienced and highly qualified university graduates to return to full-time work following career interruptions to care for a family.

The ILO report Employment and social protection in the new demographic context (http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/102/reports/reports-submitted/WCMS_209717/lang--en/index.htm) will be discussed by government, employer and worker groups of the ILO's member States at the International Labour Conference in Geneva from 5 to 21 June. A Conference committee on the issue will consider the key challenges in industrialized and developing economies – where three-quarters of older persons will be living by 2050. It will provide recommendations on what combination of social, labour market and economic policies can help ensure high levels of employment, income security and gender equity over the life cycle.



World Report on Child Labour: Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour

ILO, Geneva, 2013

Also available in French and Spanish

How can we reduce child labour in the less favourable circumstances of a global economic slowdown? This new report is the first in a series to be published annually by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). It brings together research on child labour and social protection, discussing the role of poverty and economic shocks in rendering households vulnerable to child labour and analysing the impact on child labour of cash transfers, public employment programmes, social insurance and other social protection initiatives around the world.

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CHF 50; US\$50; EUR 35

World of Work Report 2013

International Institute of Labour Studies

ILO, Geneva, 2013

The *World of Work Report 2013* provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of labour markets and social conditions around the world. It also projects employment trends and assesses the risk of social unrest. The report shows that the employment situation has deteriorated significantly in most advanced economies and highlights the spill-over effects on emerging and developing economies. It addresses questions such as:

- What are the challenges associated with an uneven job recovery from the global financial crisis?
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