The International Labour Organization and the global response to HIV/AIDS

The primary goal of the ILO is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. In this formulation of decent work, the protection of workers against work-related sickness, disease and injury, is an essential element of security a high priority for the Organization.

A Resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 2000 recognized that “HIV/AIDS threatens decent work in an all-embracing manner”. A global ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work (ILO/AIDS) was created in the same year to:

- increase the understanding of HIV/AIDS as a labour and development issue;
- mobilize the commitment and resources of the tripartite constituents – governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations - locally, nationally and globally;
- promote a systematic response to HIV/AIDS through workplace policies and programmes; and
- enhance the capacity of the constituents to plan and implement these activities.

“AIDS has a profound impact on workers and their families, enterprises and national economies. It is a workplace issue and a development challenge.”

Juan Somavia
Director-General of the ILO

The ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work

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Over 40 million people around the world are infected with HIV. Most are workers in the prime of their working lives. This epidemic of catastrophic dimension endangers the health, lives and livelihoods of individuals and also threatens enterprise survival and economic security in affected countries.

The WHO and UNAIDS 3 by 5 initiative

The goal
Treatment for all who need it – three million people treated by the end of 2005.

Currently, six million people infected with HIV in the developing world need access to ART to survive. Only 400 000 have this access. Treating 3 million people by the end of 2005 – and millions more as soon as possible – will require concerted, sustained action by many partners.

“To deliver treatment to the millions who need it, we must change the way we think and the way we act.”
LEE Jong-wook, Director-General, WHO

The strategy
- Global leadership, strong partnership and advocacy
- Urgent, sustained country support
- Simplified, standardized tools for delivering antiretroviral therapy
- Effective, reliable supply of medicines and diagnostics
- Rapidly identifying and reapplying new knowledge and successes

Ensuring access to care, treatment and support for people living with HIV/AIDS poses a complex challenge requiring the involvement of all stakeholders. The world of work can play an important role in facilitating this access and contributing effectively to the 3 by 5 goal:

- The workplace is an effective delivery point for care, support and treatment through occupational health services.
- The tripartite structure of the ILO provides the opportunity for collaborative action to reduce the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS, and create an atmosphere of trust that encourages take-up of voluntary testing and treatment.
- The ILO Code of Practice provides guidelines for integrated workplace programmes, including prevention, care and support, and measures to combat discrimination.
- The ILO’s partnerships with the Global Fund, the Global Business Coalition, the World Economic Forum, and UN agencies provide the means of mobilizing resources and extending care and treatment into the community through co-investment.
- The ILO analyzes the impact of the epidemic on human capital, and provides guidance for human resource planning and management.

The ILO contribution

Making a difference

The ILO has already started to contribute to the 3 by 5 campaign through:

- Advocating the workplace as a delivery point for treatment and care, as well as prevention;
- Strengthening the capacity of employers and workers to implement and sustain comprehensive workplace programmes;
- Encouraging employers, and donor partners as necessary, to invest in ART for workers and their families;
- Developing public and private partnerships - involving public and private employers, unions, government authorities and donors – to establish community outreach programmes that extend treatment beyond the workplace;
- Policy guidance and training to increase the capacity of all its constituents to support and sustain treatment provision;
- Mapping of enterprises already providing direct access to ARV treatment to infected workers;
- Encouraging ILO constituents to conduct ‘Know your status’ campaigns leading to treatment for infected workers;
- Advocacy and practical measures to extend social protection to increase access to care and treatment, including the development of innovative health and life insurance schemes;
- Identification and promotion of innovative strategies to address the needs of workers in small and medium-sized enterprises and the informal economy.