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## **ILO Annual Assembly: towards regulation of biological hazards and care work**

The annual assembly of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was held at the United Nations Palace in Geneva a few days ago, attended by more than 4,900 delegates from 187 countries. Among them was Silvia Pugi, the CIDA representative on the ILO Italy tripartite committee and Deputy Secretary General of CEC.

The mission of the ILO is to ensure decent working conditions and promote social justice. As the Philadelphia Declaration states: "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed, or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security, and equal opportunity."

The ILO pursues its mandate on three fronts

- Establishing and monitoring the application of international conventions and recommendations to ensure minimum labour standards and guarantee decent working and living conditions
- Protecting fundamental workers' rights, such as freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, elimination of forced and child labour, and non-discrimination
- Encouraging social dialogue among governments, employers and workers on labour issues, with a tripartite approach

In his speech, ILO Director-General Gilbert F. Houngbo presented the global labor situation.

Global macroeconomic prospects are stable, with the International Monetary Fund projecting a global GDP growth of 3.2% in 2024 and 2025. Pre-pandemic levels have been recovered, and inflation is declining, which is favorable for preserving workers' purchasing power. However, this stability could be jeopardized by significant geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East, Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, Haiti, Ukraine, and Eastern Congo.

The ILO projects a global unemployment rate of 4.9% in 2024 and 2025, down from 5% in 2023. However, this rate does not include those who have left the labor market. Therefore, the ILO has adopted a new index, the "jobs gap," which measures the number of people without jobs who are interested in finding one.

The jobs gap for women in low-income countries is 22.8%, compared to 15.3% for men, while in high-income countries, it is 9.7% for women and 7.3% for men. The employment rate for women is 45.6%, compared to 69.2% for men, with a significant gender pay gap.

Technological innovation and sustainability are changing the labor market.

On the one hand, the spread of artificial intelligence has brought improvements in most professions, but a decisive investment in training and reskilling is needed to ensure no one is left behind. On the



other hand, it is essential to ensure that the employment impacts of ecological policies do not harm people and create poverty and social exclusion..

The fight against informal employment is stalled: the number of informal workers has increased from 1.7 billion in 2005 to 2 billion in 2024. An equitable transition is needed, allowing SMEs and start-ups to move out of informality worldwide, and the ILO aims to be open to new forms of work and employment, renewing the social contract.

This year, the assembly worked to lay the groundwork for new regulations, possibly to be approved at the 2025 assembly.

- **Regulation of Biological Hazards:** The process to create the first international standard to protect workers from biological hazards has begun. There is currently no international regulation on biological hazards in the workplace, but access to a safe and healthy work environment has been elevated to a Fundamental Principle and Right at Work. Discussions will continue at the next conference, aiming to adopt a new Convention and/or Recommendation.
- **Care Economy:** This sector (care for the elderly, sick, and children) is often characterized by gender stereotypes, low wages, and precarious working conditions. The ILO aims to promote greater gender equality, value both private and public care, and share the care burden equally between men and women. Based on experiences during COVID, a resolution was approved calling for an action plan to ensure decent work in this sector and recognize the importance of the care economy for social and economic development.
- **Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW):** Crisis and war have triggered a downward trend in fundamental principles and rights at work, and the Committee identified four areas for policy action: labor market governance, freedom of association and social dialogue, formalization and sustainable enterprises, equality and inclusion.
- **Application of Standards:** The Committee's report examined the application of several conventions in 24 countries, with a special session of the Commission of Inquiry on the situation in Belarus.
- **Occupied Arab Territories:** The critical situation of workers in Gaza was highlighted and about \$10 million was pledged for an assistance programme.
- **Global Coalition for Social Justice:** During the conference, the Coalition's Inaugural Forum was held, dedicated to advancing social justice globally and exploring the roles other UN agencies, multilateral bodies such as the G7 and G20, can play in this regard.



The appointment, therefore, is for the 2025 Conference, with the agenda is already set:

- Protection against biological hazards (standards definition)
- Decent work in the platform economy (standards definition)
- Innovative approaches to addressing informal work and promoting transitions to decent and contractual work
- Second World Summit for Social Development.