

HIV/AIDS and the world economic crisis

ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work

“The ILO will not forget the millions of workers and workplaces affected by HIV/AIDS, and the fact that the impact of the economic crisis will be worse for them because of HIV/AIDS. As we take action to combat recession and build recovery, we will ensure that our response to the global crisis includes an intensification of efforts to address HIV/AIDS through the workplace”.

Sophia Kisting, Director, ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work

The impact of what started as a banking and financial crisis is now shifting to jobs, enterprises and working people. The global slowdown is aggravating social and economic inequality, which itself is closely implicated in the spread of HIV.

A vicious spiral

The ILO is well placed to demonstrate how the economic crisis has become a development crisis, and respond accordingly. This means that as we pursue our agenda for fair globalization and decent work, we address the connections between the food crisis, the energy crisis and the economic crisis – including the implications of and for HIV/AIDS. The negative effects of HIV/AIDS on development will become even stronger over the long-term if the economic crisis persists, since poverty and inequality, including gender inequality, help drive the epidemic just as the impact of the epidemic intensifies poverty and inequality.

HIV/AIDS and the economic crisis intersect at many points:

- the growth of informal and precarious employment as a result of the crisis increases the vulnerability of informal operators and workers to HIV and creates obstacles to workplace education on preventing and managing HIV/AIDS;
- the crisis has gender implications, because women will often be the first to lose their jobs as well as coming under increased pressure to support the household - just as they bear the greater part of the burden of HIV care; where there aren't many options, coping strategies can increase vulnerability to HIV;

16 April 2009

- young people, who are already over-represented among the world's unemployed, may be further marginalized as a result of the crisis and find themselves in situations where they're exposed to the risk of HIV;
- there are already signs of a dual effect on migration, with many migrant workers returning home (Eastern Europe, South Asia) because the jobs are drying up or 'reserved' for nationals, as well as others being driven to migrate because of a worsening employment situation at home;
- many of those who have already contracted the virus are in a particularly vulnerable position: the loss of a job, for example, may mean the end of vital HIV treatment (provided by employer or covered by earnings); the loss of income in an AIDS-affected household may lead to children being taken out of school and put to work; lay-offs may be used to hide or excuse HIV-related discrimination.

Hard-won gains under threat

The 2008 *Global AIDS Report*¹ from UNAIDS gave cause for optimism in many respects. Although 33 million people are living with HIV, prevalence is levelling off in a number of countries, incidence among young people is falling in several highly-affected countries, the proportion of women infected globally has stabilized at approximately the same number as men, the number of people receiving antiretroviral drugs in low- and middle-income countries has reached 3 million, and the numbers of women on medication to prevent mother to child transmission has increased from 9 per cent in 2004 to 33 per cent in 2007. However, these hard-won gains are at risk because countries will be looking for ways to reduce their budgets and individuals without jobs or social protection will be deprived of health services.

People at the heart of development

The HIV epidemic reminds us that human resources are at the heart of development – and of the capacity of countries to respond to crises. HIV/AIDS has undermined this capacity in many parts of the world. It has deprived nations of skilled and experienced teachers, managers, farmers, factory workers, government officials and care providers – paid and unpaid – and has interrupted the transfer of skills from one generation to the next. The failure to maintain efforts to reverse the epidemic will have long-lasting developmental consequences. The loss of skilled workers and managers due to HIV/AIDS threatens the capacity to plan, manage and deliver essential goods and services needed at local level in emergency situations and for long term rebuilding of communities.

¹ [2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic](#), UNAIDS, 08.2008. [French](#) ; [Spanish](#)

16 April 2009

The social and economic determinants of health are core issues for the world of work, and need to be built into the policies and interventions we advocate and implement to address the crisis. As we take action to combat recession and build recovery, we must ensure that our strategies support efforts to address HIV/AIDS through the world of work and benefit from the achievements to date of the ILO's HIV/AIDS programme, now working with the constituents in 57 countries to reduce HIV transmission and manage its impact.

Protecting workers and enterprises

The ILO will continue to give priority to responses in the informal economy, to the promotion of gender equality in the face of AIDS, to programmes to provide jobs, hope and life-saving information for young people. Specific measures being taken by the HIV/AIDS programme include an increase in programmes to offer livelihoods support to people affected by HIV, through social protection, skills training and promoting employment opportunities. The Decent Work Country Programmes will provide the framework for integrated responses in member States, ensuring that policies to address the social and their economic dimensions of the global crisis are rights-based, and include the rights of those affected by HIV.

A crisis – be it the current economic recession or the continuing but still urgent HIV epidemic - cannot be a reason to take the 'decent' out of decent work. On the contrary, it is by insisting on decent work that we help workers, enterprises and governments cope with crises and over the longer term move out of poverty.

Further reading

[Digest of good legislative practices relating to HIV/AIDS in selected African countries \(English and French version\) \(pdf 930 KB\)](#), J. Hodges, ILO, 2007

[Employers' organization and HIV/AIDS \[CD ROM\] : information, tools and good practices for workplace action against HIV/AIDS](#), ILO, 2006

[A handbook on HIV/AIDS for labour and factory inspectors \(pdf 1.6 MB\)](#), ILO, 2005
• [French](#) • [Spanish](#)

[Helping micro and small enterprises cope with HIV/AIDS : a handbook for small business associations and service providers \(pdf 1.8 MB\)](#), ILO, 2007

[HIV/AIDS and work : global estimates, impact on children and youth, and response, 2006 \(pdf 5.4 MB\)](#), ILO, 2006

[HIV and labour migration : UNAIDS Policy brief \(pdf 585 KB\)](#), ILO, IOM, UNAIDS, 2008

[HIV Interventions for Young People in the Workplace : Guidance brief](#), Inter-Agency Task Team on HIV and Young People, 2008

[The ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work \(pdf 126 KB\)](#), ILO, 2001 • [French \(pdf 190 KB\)](#) • [Spanish \(pdf 171 KB\)](#) • [Other languages](#)

[Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work: an education and training manual](#), ILO, 2002 • [French](#) • [Spanish](#)

[Saving lives, protecting jobs : International HIV/AIDS Workplace Education Programme : SHARE: Strategic HIV/AIDS Responses in Enterprises: second report \(pdf 3.7 MB\)](#), ILO, 2008