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## Migrants and minorities still vulnerable to discrimination at work – UN report



16 May 2011 –

Migrant workers and minorities are among groups that continue to face discrimination in the labour market as a result of the global economic crisis, despite positive advances in anti-discrimination laws, the United Nations International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) said in a report [unveiled](#) today.

“Economically adverse times are a breeding ground for discrimination at work and in society more broadly. We see this with the rise of populist solutions,” said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia at the release of *Global Report on Equality at Work 2011: The Continuing Challenge*.

The [report](#) warns against a tendency during economic downturns to give lower priority to anti-discrimination policies and workers’ rights in practice.

“Austerity measures and cutbacks in the budget of labour administrations and inspection services, and in funds available to specialized bodies dealing with non-discrimination and equality, can seriously compromise the ability of existing institutions to prevent the economic crisis from generating more discrimination and more inequalities,” the report points out.

It urges governments to put into place human, technical and financial resources to improve data collection on discrimination at the national level.

The report notes that there has been significant progress in advancing gender equality in the workplace, but the gender pay gap remains, with women’s wages on average 70 to 90 per cent of men’s earnings.

While flexible arrangements of working schedules are gradually being introduced as an element of more family-friendly policies, discrimination related to pregnancy and maternity is still common, according to the report.

It also highlights sexual harassment as a significant problem in workplaces, with young, financially dependent, single or divorced women, and migrants the most vulnerable. Men who experience harassment tend to be young, gay or members of ethnic or racial minorities.

Barriers impeding equal access to the labour market still need to be dismantled, particularly for people of African and Asian descent, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities, and above all, women in those groups.

Increasing numbers of women and men experience discrimination on religious grounds, while discrimination on the basis of political opinion tends to take place in the public sector, where loyalty to the policies of authorities in power can be a factor in access to employment, according to the report.

Work-related discrimination continues to exist for many of the world's 650 million persons with disabilities as their low employment rate reveals. People living with HIV/AIDS are vulnerable to discrimination through mandatory testing policies, or testing under conditions which are not genuinely voluntary or confidential, the report added.

The report recommends a series of steps to combat discrimination, including: promoting the universal ratification and application of the two fundamental ILO Conventions on equality and non-discrimination; developing and sharing knowledge on the elimination of discrimination in employment; developing the institutional capacity of ILO constituents to more effectively implement the fundamental right of non-discrimination at work; and strengthening international partnerships with major actors on equality.

“The fundamental right of non-discrimination in employment and occupation for all women and men is part and parcel of decent work policies for sustainable and balanced economic growth and fairer societies,” said Mr. Somavia.

“The right response is to combine policies for economic growth with policies for employment, social protection and rights at work, enabling governments, social partners and civil society to work together, including changing attitudes through education.”

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