



International Labour Organization  
Global Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work

## ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work: Questions and answers

### Q. Why is HIV/AIDS a workplace issue?

A. The majority of those infected by HIV are workers in their productive prime. HIV/AIDS cuts the supply of labour and slashes income for many workers. Increased absenteeism raises labour costs for employers and, as illness forces workers to leave their jobs, valuable skills and experience are lost. There is a negative impact on the economy through losses in productivity and lower tax revenues. HIV/AIDS threatens fundamental rights at work and undermines efforts to provide women and men with decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. Discrimination against HIV-positive persons worsens existing inequalities in society, and the large number of orphans left behind is pushing children into exploitative child labour. In many countries the epidemic is undermining decades of development gains and constitutes a real threat to social and economic progress.

### Q. Why has the ILO developed a Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work?

A. The ILO has developed a Code of Practice in response to many requests for guidance from its tripartite constituents. The Code represents the ILO's commitment to help secure conditions of decent work and social protection in the face of a major development and humanitarian crisis. The Code is now an essential part of the ILO's contribution to the global efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

### Q. What is the main objective of the Code of Practice?

A. The objective of the Code is to provide guidance for the world of work to help reduce the spread and impact of the epidemic. The Code contains fundamental principles for policy development and practical guidelines from which concrete responses can be developed at the enterprise, sectoral and national levels in the following key areas:

- prevention of HIV/AIDS
- management and mitigation of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the world of work
- care and support of workers infected and affected by HIV/AIDS
- elimination of stigma and discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status

### Q. What are the key principles of the Code?

A. The Code establishes principles that include non-discrimination in employment on the basis of real or suspected HIV status, no termination of employment because of HIV status, confidentiality, gender equality, strict limits on testing, and the need for social dialogue, prevention programmes, and care and support, as the basis for addressing the epidemic in the workplace.

## Q. How was the Code developed?

A. A Resolution on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work, adopted at the International Labour Conference in June 2000, resulted in a special programme on HIV/AIDS within the International Labour Office. The Conference Resolution also requested that international guidelines be developed to tackle HIV/AIDS in the workplace. The Code is the product of collaboration between the ILO and its tripartite constituents. It was reviewed and revised by a tripartite group of experts and subsequently adopted by the ILO Governing Body in June 2001.

## Q. Who will use the Code?

A. The Code applies to all aspects of work, formal and informal, and all employers and workers in the public and private sectors. These include governments and their authorities (for example occupational health personnel, labour inspectors, employment tribunals), employers' and workers' organizations, specialists in HIV/AIDS issues, and all relevant stakeholders. The Code is not only intended for countries where the epidemic has a strong grip: its purpose is also to prevent infection rates from increasing in relatively unaffected countries.

## Q. How can the Code be used?

A. The provisions of the Code are based on widely accepted ILO principles and standards, which have been adapted to the specific circumstances of the HIV epidemic and its impact on the world of work. The Code can be an instrument for advocacy, in particular for strengthening the involvement of the private sector in action against HIV/AIDS. The Code is a consensus document, and therefore useful to initiate social dialogue and serve as a guide to the development and implementation of workplace policies and programmes. Provisions of the Code can also be adopted as the basis of national legislation, strategies and action plans to combat HIV/AIDS.

## Q. Where do we go from here?

A. The Code establishes the importance of the workplace in HIV prevention and the protection of the rights of those affected by the epidemic. It was formally launched at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, in New York, 25-27 June. Although it is a pioneering instrument, the Code only represents a beginning in the process of mobilising all those with a stake in the world of work. The greater challenge remains in its distribution and effective implementation. Within the ILO the Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, has taken the initiative to develop a personnel policy on HIV/AIDS based on the Code, and to apply it throughout the International Labour Office. He appealed to all participants at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS – including other agencies of the UN system – to adopt the Code and ensure its effective implementation in their various workplaces.