

Preface

The struggle for equality is intimately linked to the struggle for social justice in the world of work.

**Guy Ryder, ILO Director-General,
International Women's Day 2014**

The year 2019 will mark both the ILO's 100th anniversary and the first centenary of international labour standards on maternity protection. In fact, protecting maternity at work was one of the primary concerns of the ILO. It was during the first International Labour Conference in 1919 that the first Convention on maternity protection (Convention No. 3) was adopted. This Convention was followed by the adoption of other two Maternity Protection Conventions: No. 103 in 1952 and No. 183 in 2000. These standards progressively expanded the scope and entitlements related to maternity protection at work in line with the evolving status and recognition of women's rights in the world of work. Over the years, the core concerns of the ILO have been to ensure that work performed by women, in all its forms and situations, does not pose risks to the health of the woman and her child and to ensure that women's reproductive role does not compromise their economic and employment security and subject them to undue discrimination. During the ILO's history, international labour standards on maternity protection, in line with the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), have indeed reaffirmed the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women, which is at the heart of social justice, the constitutional mandate of the ILO. In addition, the adoption of the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) marked the recognition that "a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women", as stated in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979.

Almost a century later, the importance of quality work to the lives of most adult members of society,

especially in times of deep economic turbulence and social change, still makes the intersection of work with maternity, paternity and care responsibilities a particularly critical focal point for efforts to improve health, equality and job quality. These issues are therefore crucial for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and make maternity protection and work–family measures key to the achievement of global development goals. First, by reducing child and maternal mortality and morbidity, maternity protection promotes the health and well-being of mothers and their babies. Second, by safeguarding women's employment and income security during pregnancy and after childbirth and promoting the equal sharing of unpaid care work between women and men, maternity protection and measures to support care responsibilities are also a precondition to the achievement of gender equality at work and in the home.

Equality for women represents progress for all. In order to help equip the Organization to successfully meet the challenges of delivering its mandate on social justice in the future, the ILO Director General launched the ILO Centenary Initiative on Women at Work. This initiative aims to survey the place and conditions of women in the world of work and to engage ILO constituents – governments, workers' and employers' organizations – in concrete action to realize equality of opportunity and treatment.¹ This report is one of the first contributions to this global assessment and focuses on one of the first labour rights of women in work proclaimed by ILO constituents in 1919: maternity protection. This report also marks ILO's contribution to the United Nations observance of the International Day of Families 2014, which celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994. The 2014 theme emphasizes the