

international community's recognition that families and policies to support them matter to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals and should be advanced further.²

The report reviews national law and practice on both maternity and paternity at work across the world. Rights and practices that recognize the fundamental need and responsibility for parenthood of both women and men are mutually reinforcing and crucial for the achievement of equality of opportunity and treatment. Drawing from the ILO Working Conditions Laws Database – Maternity Protection, the comments of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations and ILO research, the report provides a rich international comparative analysis on the state of legal protection of maternity and paternity at work. It is based on an extensive set of new legal and statistical indicators, including coverage in law and in practice, which provide a global and regional review of national legislation and practices as well as their evolution over the last 20 years, including in light of the recent economic crisis and austerity measures.

So far, 66 ILO member States have ratified at least one of the maternity protection Conventions and 43 have ratified Convention No. 156. Moreover, whether ratified or not, the Conventions have had a very broad influence, with virtually all countries having adopted maternity protection legislation. Over the last 20 years, there have been noticeable improvements in terms of longer rest periods at the time of childbirth, and movement away from employer liability systems of financing paid maternity leave. An increasing number of countries are also implementing measures to support both mothers' and fathers' care responsibilities, such as paternity, parental and adoption leave, as well as services and facilities to enable nursing and childcare.

However, progress has been uneven across ILO member States and needs to be expedited. Supporting maternity and paternity at work still faces a number of diverse challenges. Over 800 million mothers around the world are still not adequately protected with leave

and cash benefits in case of maternity. Almost 80 per cent of these workers are found in Africa and Asia. Effective access to quality maternal health care is still not universal. Discrimination based on pregnancy, maternity and family responsibilities is endemic everywhere. Many formal and informal workplaces remain unsafe and unhealthy for all workers, especially pregnant and nursing women. Fathers' take-up of childcare leave is still very low. Care provision for children, dependent elderly and people living with permanent or temporary disabilities or illnesses still lacks the accessible and quality services and facilities that recognize, value and support care work – both paid and unpaid – as a “public good”. The impact of the crisis has further exacerbated pre-existing gaps and inequalities, often with devastating consequences for families. These challenges underscore the importance of social dialogue and effective tripartite policy action; the need to design and implement in an inclusive way legislation in line with international labour standards and collect statistical information in order to measure gaps and progress.

This report provides a current picture of where we stand and what we have learned so far on maternity and paternity at work. It also suggests that we want to be, before the ILO Centenary, in a world in which women and men do not have to sacrifice their lives, well-being and the care of their families in order to earn an income. We hope it will guide ILO tripartite constituents and the Organization's technical assistance in making a difference to the lives of working mothers and fathers and ensure that the principles of long-standing international labour standards become a reality for all everywhere.

Notes

1. ILO, 2013. Report of the Director-General: Towards the centenary: Realities, renewal and tripartite commitment, Report I(A), International Labour Conference, 102nd Session, 2013.
2. UNDESA: International Day of Families, <http://undesadspd.org/Family/InternationalObservances/InternationalDayofFamilies.aspx> [26 Mar. 2014].

SHAUNA OLNEY
Chief
Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch

MANUELA TOMEI
Director
Conditions of Work and Equality Department