

Health protection at the workplace

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KEY MESSAGES

- Workplaces have to be safe for all workers, both women and men, at all stages of their life cycle. Gender-specific interventions, for pregnant and breastfeeding workers, are also needed.
- Protective measures should be strictly restricted to maternity and not based on stereotypes of women's professional abilities and roles in society.
- Workers should not be obliged to perform work that is hazardous, unhealthy or harmful to their health or that of their unborn or newborn child.
- There are statutory measures on dangerous or unhealthy work affecting pregnant or nursing women in 111 out of 160 countries with available information.
- The importance of workplace risk assessments in ensuring health protection is increasingly being recognized.
- Arrangement of working time as a means of health protection for pregnant or nursing workers is important. Several ILO member States have provisions covering night work and overtime.
- The ILO Committee of Experts has indicated that blanket bans on dangerous work as well as night work and overtime for all women, however laudable they may seem in terms of concern for health, are contrary to the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation and contribute to gender-based discrimination at work.
- Time off for prenatal health care is vital for detecting and preventing complications in pregnancy and for ensuring that pregnant women know their HIV status. Yet, 116 out of 156 countries do not provide for time off for prenatal health care.
- Recommendation No. 191 indicates that protective measures should be taken when a workplace risk is established. Of the 160 countries with information, 84 provide some sort of alternative to dangerous work while 76 do not.

Each Member shall, after consulting the representative organizations of employers and workers, adopt appropriate measures to ensure that pregnant or breastfeeding women are not obliged to perform work which has been determined by the competent authority to be prejudicial to the health of the mother or the child, or where an assessment has established a significant risk to the mother's health or that of her child.

Convention No. 183, Article 3

Occupational safety and health provisions [shall] take into account the need to provide a safe and healthy environment for both men and women workers, while taking into account the differences which mean that they are exposed to specific risks in terms of health, and to ensure that they are not an obstacle to the access of women to employment and to the various occupations. [Governments should also] ensure that the measures for the protection of women are limited to what is strictly necessary to protect maternity [...]

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