

## Global Wage Report 2008/09

Minimum wages and collective bargaining:  
Towards policy coherence



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## *Preface*

Wage employment and wages are central to the world of work. Approximately half of the global labour force works for a wage. Living standards and the livelihood of wage earners and families depend on the level of wages, when and how they are adjusted and paid. Wages are a major component of overall consumption and a key factor in the economic performance of countries.

The enormous expansion of the labour force participating directly and indirectly in the international exchange of goods and services and the growing interdependence of low-, middle- and high-income countries has squarely placed wages at the centre of the debate on globalization. It is the responsibility of the ILO to make available for public use data on levels and trends in wages around the world. This report illustrates the wide variety in recent wage trends across countries and regions, from very rapid increases in a few countries to very modest growth in many others.

A general trend is that wages have grown at a substantially slower pace than GDP per capita. A majority of countries registered a decline in the share of national income that goes to wages, suggesting a lag between the growth in productivity and the growth in wages. The report also presents evidence to suggest that while wages do not increase as fast as overall economic growth in upswings, they slow more rapidly in downswings. If this pattern were to be followed in the rapidly spreading global downturn that has accelerated in 2008 it would deepen the recession and delay the recovery.

Most countries also display an increase in wage inequality, with top wages tending to increase much faster than those of the large majority of wage earners. Countries with a higher coverage of collective bargaining tend to have a narrower dispersion of wages.

The ILO is actively engaged in the promotion of a fair globalization providing opportunities for all. The ILO Decent Work Agenda offers a practical way forward based on four strategic components of rights at work, employment and enterprise development, social protection, and social dialogue and tripartite consultations. The legitimacy of globalization and of open economies and societies hinges critically on greater fairness in outcomes. Central to this fairness is the ability of working women and men to obtain a fair share of the wealth they create.

The International Labour Conference adopted in June 2008 an ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization recalling such principles and setting out an approach for countries and employers' and workers' organizations to promote balanced economic and social policies. The Declaration supports "policies in regard to wages and earnings, hours and other conditions of work, designed to ensure a just share of the fruits of progress to all and a minimum living wage to all employed and in need of such protection". In order to translate these principles into effective policies, the ILO provides policy-makers and social partners with information and analysis of recent trends in a large number of countries.

This report collates and elaborates on data made available to the ILO through national statistical offices, Ministries of Labour and other institutions. There is much work ahead in order to improve the scope, regularity and comparability of information and data on levels, trends and distribution of wages. The ILO is ready to assist in this effort together with other national, regional and global institutions. Strengthening the social dimension of globalization also implies investing more resources in collecting and making available data on social outcomes of economic growth.

Reports such as these are one of the best ways in which the ILO can assist its Members in advancing their national decent work goals. They strengthen the ILO's capacity to provide technical assistance to constituents on wage policies and the links between productivity, economic performance, prices and wages.

Juan Somavia  
*Director-General*

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