

2025 International Labour Conference: Major advances for workers' rights at the ILO

The 113th ILC was held in Geneva from 2-13 June 2025. It was attended by more than 5,400 delegates from 187 member states, representing Governments, Employers' and Workers' organizations. Congress was represented by David Joyce and Deirdre O'Connor (INTO). Ibec representative was Neil O'Brien, Senior Employer Relations and Communications Executive, and the Government by a number of Government officials, including Ms Yvonne White, Assistant Secretary General Department Enterprise Tourism and Employment (responsibility for the Workplace Regulation and Economic Migration Divisions). Ambassador of Ireland to the United Nations, Mr. Noel White also attended the opening session.

The conference is an important annual event with decisions that reaffirm the International Labour Organization's (ILO) central role in promoting social justice, defending democratic values and responding to today's global challenges in the world of work. This year unions welcomed a new Convention on biohazards at work plus the agreement to negotiate a new Convention on decent work in the platform economy. A full account of the conference is set out below.

Platform work

In a win for the [ITUC campaign for platform workers](#), the ILC held its [first standard-setting discussion on decent work in the platform economy](#) and agreed to develop a new ILO Convention and Recommendation to be finalised and adopted in 2026 at the 114th Session of the ILC. This responds to the urgent needs of millions of platform workers - many of them young and in precarious situations - and aims to guarantee their rights, social protection and safety at work.

The [proposed standards](#) cover a wide range of issues, such as fundamental principles and rights at work, fair remuneration, social security, occupational safety and health, impact of automated systems on working conditions and access to work, protection of personal data and privacy, and effective access to dispute resolution.

This is the first time in history that governments, employers and workers have committed to establishing international labour standards specifically for digital platform workers. From rideshare drivers to delivery workers, from care workers to content moderators — millions of people finally have a path to the protections they deserve.

Major wins included:

 *An enforceable international agreement to protect platform workers* — with negotiations starting in 2026 to finalise specific protections, and

 *Greater digital transparency* — workers will have the right to see how apps and algorithms determine their pay, hours and whether they get fired

Biological Hazards Convention

The ILC adopted a Convention and accompanying Recommendation on biological hazards, a landmark step to protect all workers from exposure to viruses, bacteria, and other biological risks.

The [Convention \(C 192\)](#) calls on Member States to formulate national policies and adopt measures on occupational safety and health that include the prevention and protection against biological hazards, and the development of preparedness and response measures to deal with accidents and emergencies. It requires employers to adopt preventive and protective measures, in collaboration with workers, who must also be informed and trained on the hazards and risks.

The [accompanying Recommendation](#) provides detailed guidance on implementation, including risk assessment, early warning systems, preparedness, and response measures (for example in the event of outbreaks, epidemics, or pandemics) and training. It also further elaborates on the definition of biological hazards and risk and lists specific routes of exposure and transmission – such as airborne, contact, or vector-borne pathways.

Taken together, the instruments offer a powerful, adaptable framework to prevent biological risks in every type of workplace, now and into the future. Conventions are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by member States, while Recommendations serve as non-binding guidelines.

This is the first time the ILO has set global standards on such hazards, with strong provisions on prevention, inspection, whistle-blower protections, access to health services, and compensation for occupational disease and injury. Unions will now call for urgent ratification and effective implementation by all countries.

Detailed explainer available here: <https://www.equaltimes.org/biological-hazards-at-work-a-new?lang=en>

Action on Myanmar, Palestine and Saudi Arabia

For only the third time in its history, the ILC adopted a resolution under Article 33 of the ILO Constitution. It took the [decision against Myanmar](#), in response to systematic violations of fundamental labour rights by the military junta. David had a bilateral meeting with some of the Myanmar delegation at the conference.

Invoking Article 33 is the gravest measure available in the ILO framework. The resolution urges ILO governments, companies and unions worldwide to ensure that their actions do not enable the junta's continued repression. This includes by reviewing investments, supply chains and cooperation that may indirectly or directly support the regime, as well as the supply of weapons, jet fuel and financial flows to the military junta.

Another significant step was the [recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state](#). The ILC decided to [invite Palestine to participate in ILO meetings](#) as a non-member observer State, ending its previous status as a liberation movement. In the midst of a devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza, this recognition of Palestine as a state improves the ability of Palestinian representatives to participate in ILO deliberations and defend the rights of their workers. David and Deridre also held a bilateral meeting with Shaher Saed, General Secretary of the PGFTU.

Meanwhile, workers' representatives at the ILC [filed a complaint against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](#), citing widespread violations of migrant workers' rights. Lodged under Article 26 of the Constitution of the ILO, the application calls for urgent international action and accountability.

David also sought support from our Government in calling out the disgraceful exclusion by the Trump administration of our Brothers and sisters in the AFLCIO from the USA delegation to the conference. Our Government (not alone by the way) were very reluctant to speak out in public on the matter, citing bad timing, Trump Tariffs etc... (Coincidentally, less than two weeks later, Ireland was part of a core group of countries that tabled a "Civil Society Space Resolution" purporting to be against such interference at the Human Rights Council – in the very same room...).

Informal economy

A General Discussion on decent work in the informal economy produced a strong outcome, calling for national strategies to ensure full formalisation. Workers highlighted the reality faced by the majority of the world's workforce: lack of rights, exclusion from protections and growing informality even in high-income countries.

The discussion reaffirmed the enabling rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, the importance of addressing misclassification and labour law evasion, and the need for universal social protection. The outcome reinforced [Recommendation 204](#) as a global roadmap and included commitments on gender equality, Just Transition, and living wages in line with the ILO's 2024 Principles.

The ILC also adopted a [Resolution to reduce informality and support the transition to formal work](#). The resolution calls for urgent action to improve working conditions, extend social protection, and create decent jobs, especially for those most affected by informality. It also requests the ILO to develop a global roadmap and support countries in putting national strategies into action.

Other significant matters

The issue of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) overshadowed initial discussions about the ILO's programme and budget (P&B) for the coming years. Increasingly some Governments seek removal of any SOGI references if they are to approve the P&B. This leaves the Workers' Group in a difficult situation seeking to defend the work of the ILO around the world and to ensure that all workers are covered. The ITUC warned against attempts by governments to block ILO work in support of LGBTIQ+ workers as part of a broader agenda to weaken the ILO's core mandate. The P&B was approved with an understanding that there would be a further discussion on these matters at the November 2025 Governing Body.

The plenary also reviewed the ILO Director-General, Gilbert F. Hounbo's, reports [Jobs, rights and growth: Reinforcing the connection](#) and [the situation of workers in the Occupied Arab territories](#). 326 delegates addressed the plenary, including David Joyce on behalf of the Worker delegation from Ireland. David's speech can be viewed here: <https://www.ictu.ie/publications/speech-international-labour-conference-2025>

The ILC also approved, by an overwhelming majority, seven [amendments to the Code of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#) (MLC, 2006). The changes address violence and harassment on board, reinforce the right to shore leave and repatriation, and call for recognizing seafarers as key workers. They also improve access to medical care and ensure fair treatment in cases of detention or maritime accidents.

In addition, formal approval was given to the ILO's tripartite contribution to the Second World Summit for Social Development, set for November 2025 in Doha, Qatar. The [Resolution](#) calls for the active involvement of employers' and workers' organizations and assigns the ILO a leading role in following up and monitoring the Summit's outcomes.

The delegates of the Conference approved the report of the [Committee on the Application of Standards](#) (CAN), which examined the application of several ILO Conventions in 24 individual country cases. In addition, during a special sitting on Belarus, the Committee urged compliance with the 2003 Commission of Inquiry's recommendations on Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 and expressed deep concern over the Belarus Government's continued use of criminal sanctions and judicial harassment against trade unionists engaged in legitimate activities. It also examined the application of four

Conventions and two Recommendations in the area of employment injury protection across ratifying and non-ratifying Member States.