Deregulatory narratives have recently gained ground in both the research and policy arenas in efforts to quantify and compare labour laws and to assess their economic impacts. In initiatives to advance global production and investment too, flexibilisation is advanced as necessary and desirable for enhancing competitiveness and creating employment. These variants of the deregulatory agenda more firmly target less-developed economies while extending further into the traditional corpus of labour law. They also offer policy actors a narrow vision of labour market regulation - one that assumes that the curbing or removal of legal entitlements is the sole pathway to economic prosperity – and thereby obscure the research that points to the design of labour law regimes suited to contemporary economic conditions that also have the potential to foster the well-being of workers, their families and communities.

Given the pace and intensity of the attacks on labour standards and the signs of an evolving ‘global consensus’ on the acceptable contours of labour law frameworks, it is timely to scrutinize the emergence of the deregulatory discourse in its contemporary forms, and to consider whether reinforcing rather than retreating from labour laws may be the more promising avenue for future social and economic progress. The Regulating for Decent Work (RDW) network has been established as a forum to advance research on these questions. It is also intended to facilitate the involvement of academic researchers in policy processes, and in particular with the international body responsible for advancing social justice in the labour field, the International Labour Organization (ILO).

To advance these objectives, abstracts are requested for an international Conference on Regulating for Decent Work: Innovative Regulation as a Response to Globalization to be held in the International Labour Office, Geneva from 8-10 July 2009.

In line with the objectives of the RDW network, the Conference will explore responses to current deregulatory agendas and examine techniques for strengthening regulatory measures in substance or scope and heightening their influence on the practices of working life. Researchers from all regions are encouraged to attend and from a range of disciplines including law, economics, industrial relations, development studies, sociology and geography.
Abstracts for papers are invited that address one or more of the Conference Themes outlined below. The papers will address central features of the contemporary debates on labour market regulation, and will therefore be expected to include contributions on the measurement and comparison of domestic labour standards; the impact and influence of labour laws; the regulation of ‘non-traditional’ workers and employers (‘non-standard’ and ‘informal’ working relationships, small- and micro-enterprises etc.); the role of labour law in developing economies; innovative or overlooked modes of regulation (public procurement, financial incentives etc.); and the relationship between public and private regulatory initiatives and multi-stakeholder alliances. In line with the objectives of the RDW network, papers are particularly welcome that address regulatory domains beyond the ‘core’ labour standards of the ILO’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and in particular on the regulation of wages, working hours, work/family, health and safety, security of employment and social protection, including the ability of vulnerable workers to access these labour rights.

Submission of abstracts

Abstracts should be submitted to travail@ilo.org. They will be subject to a competitive review process. It is expected that an edited volume will be produced that will draw on selected Conference papers.

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 31st January 2009
Deadline for submission of final paper: 31st May 2009

Conference themes

Track 1 Quality of working life as a regulatory objective

Wages and hours regulation have become more central to deregulatory discourses in recent years and also feature prominently in research efforts to quantify domestic labour standards and assess their economic impact. Yet simultaneously, the intersection of paid labour and other facets of workers’ lives - and in particular their availability to, and support for, their families - is a central feature of social policy debates across industrialized countries and increasingly in other regions. And in the academic realm, the notion of ‘quality of work’ has experienced a resurgence in recent work, which attends to traditional concerns but also extends to more recently recognised elements of working life such as worker autonomy and control and work intensification. This track will explore the role of working conditions regulation in advancing the ‘quality of working life,’ in particular by questioning which regulatory models are best suited to this objective. Papers are particularly encouraged that have a focus on recent trends in the regulation of wages, working hours and work/family or which analyse efforts to quantify working conditions regulations. Multidisciplinary approaches are also strongly encouraged.
Track 2  
**New directions in the implementation and enforcement of ‘non-core’ norms**

States face difficult policy choices in developing and enforcing labour regulation to advance labour rights and standards that are not embraced by the ‘core’ rights set out in the ILO’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Key topics not covered by that Declaration include working time, minimum wages, maternity protection, health and safety, and employment protection and dismissal rights. States must balance the twin – and apparently competing – goals of improving job quality while promoting and rewarding entrepreneurship and economic growth. Moreover they face considerable pressure, particularly from the Bretton Woods institutions, to ‘deregulate’ their labour markets on the assumption that this will encourage economic development and ‘formalisation’. However, there is little evidence that removing labour rights and standards or exempting sectors of the economy from their application has major positive effects in terms of economic growth. On the other hand, it has been argued that a more promising solution is for States to explore innovative approaches to the design, enforcement and observance of ‘non-core’ labour rights and standards in order to maintain legislative safeguards over the welfare of individual workers, while also encouraging economic and employment growth. This track will explore how non-core labour rights are or can be advanced through innovative and responsive methods of labour regulation and enforcement. Papers submitted for this track are encouraged to consider mechanisms by which States can better enforce existing labour standards where protection of workers has been undermined by weak enforcement of applicable laws, such as where States employ tripartite and participatory enforcement approaches, education and information campaigns, targeted inspections, and training. Papers may also consider innovative approaches to the extension of labour protections to workers who are exempted from legislative measures (eg. non-standard workers, and workers in Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs)). Empirical studies of existing innovative and responsive regulatory approaches are particularly welcome.

Track 3  
**Searching for the appropriate labour market regulations for employment promotion and labour market adjustment: when security matters as much as flexibility**

Globalization and technological changes have increased competitive pressures on national economies and firms, calling for frequent and rapid adjustment to meet fluctuations in demand and to advance productivity. This need for more flexible labour markets has led to a general agenda of deregulation which has focused on the costs of employment protection legislation (“EPL”). The argument made, in this regard, is that direct costs, such as severance payments, or other procedural requirements in favour of redundant workers, such as assistance in re-employment and funding of labour market training, may have detrimental effects on labour costs, employment and productivity. After decades of both theoretical and empirical research, however, the debate on the effects of hiring and firing rules on labour market outcomes remains inconclusive and academics have failed to reach consensus. The problem may be both methodological (such as the lack of satisfactory EPL measurements) and conceptual (cost-benefits analyses and the role of interactions between the respective institutions that influence labour markets should, for example, be considered critical aspects in the debate). This track will thus (i) explore potential alternative models and methodologies that can take into account both costs and benefits; and (ii) explore the role of ILO Conventions not as constraints on ‘doing business,’ but as key elements of an integrated approach to enhancing both flexibility and security in the labour market.
Guidelines for abstracts

- Abstracts should be a maximum of 400 words including references and appendices.
- Each abstract should include:
  - the paper title;
  - names and institutional affiliations of all authors;
  - the contact address and email of the correspondence author;
  - the proposed Conference track.
- Abstracts should be submitted as a single-spaced Word document formatted to A4 size in 12 point Arial font.
- Guidelines for final papers will be communicated to the authors of selected abstracts.

Conference participation

There will be no fee for conference participants. Travel costs must be met from participants’ own resources, although limited funds will be available to fund the travel costs of authors of selected papers who are based in transition and developing countries. Interest in these funds should be indicated in the abstract proposal.

Papers will be presented in English.

Further information

Questions on submission of abstracts and papers can be addressed to any of the RDIW Organizing Committee:

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