

ILO Library: knowledge centre on the world of work

The ILO Library is a knowledge centre for ILO officials and for people researching labour and social issues worldwide. In 2020, the ILO Library proudly celebrates its centenary.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was created in 1919, as part of the [Treaty of Versailles](#) that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice.“¹ The ILO today is the United Nations agency for the world of work. ffff

Knowledge services

The ILO Library's role is to actively promote the ILO's knowledge and expertise and to strengthen the Organization's research capacities.

The ILO Library in Geneva manages, develops and preserves the institutional repository of electronic and print ILO publications produced in Geneva and around the world and makes them accessible for the use of present and future audiences. Thanks to our digitization programme, ninety per cent of ILO publications produced since 1919 are freely available in digital formats.

The Library also produces online knowledge products to facilitate the discovery of ILO research and history. Just to mention two: we developed 26 research guides in three languages on labour related topics and several digital collections of ILO documents related to important ILO events, meetings or subjects.

A little bit of history

The original constitution of the ILO defined that the “functions of the International Labour Office shall include the collection and distribution of information on all subjects relating to the international adjustment of conditions of industrial life and labour...”

With such a clear mandate, the first Librarian, Miss H.-A. Lake, former librarian from the UK Ministry of Labour², was appointed on 12 April 1920, one year after the foundation of the ILO. Her responsibilities included collecting and cataloguing reports and periodicals as well as replying to information requests.³

In August 1920, the ILO purchased its first collection, the complete library of the International Association for Labour Legislation (Basel Institute) on national legislation and labour issues ⁴. The first automated catalogue was launched in 1965 using ISIS. “By 1975, most printed catalogues had been eliminated” and users searched the LABORDOC database. ⁵

Core collections

At the beginning, the Library had the ambition to collect all publications on labour and social issues. The first ILO Director, Albert Thomas proposed in 1928 that “governments, organisations or institutions, authors or publishers” should send their publications to the Library “treating the International Labour Office Library as a sort of international "legal deposit" library for all publications concerning labour, its history and legislation.” ⁶

Thanks to these efforts, the Library holds important collections on social and economic subjects, national labour legislation and labour statistics from the 19th and 20th centuries, including the former library of ILO Director Albert Thomas.

Nevertheless, priorities of the Library have been changed over time, as information has become more accessible in the digital age. Today, the ILO Library focuses on making ILO information accessible and discoverable to everybody through its institutional repository, Labordoc and knowledge services.

Clients: ILO officials and people around the world

The ILO Library serves the information needs of ILO officials around the world, ILO constituents and conference delegates. We ensure that ILO officials have access to the best academic databases, publications and peer-reviewed journals on social, economic or legal topics. In addition to traditional information services, we have implemented an outreach and liaison librarian programme with ILO departments, offering personalized research assistance for ILO officials, in-depth research and help managing bibliographic references.

The Library also serves as an information resource for people researching labour and social issues worldwide. We answer more than 5,800 questions each year by email, from workers, managers, researchers, students, journalists, HR professionals and ILO officials. They are looking for ILO publications, electronic resources, national laws, labour statistics or other topics related to the world of work.

While we offer most of our services remotely, we also receive external researchers from 9-5, Monday-Friday and provide guidance on accessing our collections on-site.

Partnerships

The ILO Library collaborates closely with other UN Libraries, ILO depository libraries around the world, RERO and is part of the Association of International Library and Information Specialists ([AILIS](#)).

Finally, the ILO Library manages a programme, [GOALI - Global Online Access to Legal Information](#) as part of the Research4Life partnership that provides developing countries with free or low-cost access to academic and professional peer-reviewed content online.

Research4Life is a public-private partnership of WHO, FAO, UNEP, WIPO, ILO, Cornell and Yale Universities and approximately 170 international publishers.

¹ [History of the ILO](#), accessed March 9, 2020.

² Kargul Maccabez J, *Histoire de la Bibliothèque du Bureau International du Travail*. (Geneve: PrivPrint, 1995).

³ "Establishment Minute No 17," February 14, 1920, F.I.L./D., ILO Archive.

⁴ Kargul Maccabez J, *Histoire de la Bibliothèque du Bureau International du Travail* (Geneve: PrivPrint, 1995).

⁵ Services of the ILO Central Library and Documentation Branch. (1982). Geneva: ILO.

⁶ Rapport du Directeur présentée à la Conférence Volume II . (1928). Geneve: BIT., p 42.



Edit Horvath

Mrs Horvath has a Master of Library and Information Science degree from the University of Eotvos Lorand, Budapest and Université Libre de Bruxelles. She currently works in the Digital Research Team of the ILO Library and serves as a Co-Chair of Communication Committee of the Research4Life partnership. Mrs Horvath is also the communication focal point of the GOALI programme offering access to legal information and publications in developing countries.

Abstract

English

Founded one hundred years ago, the ILO Library supports the research activities and the work of the ILO, the UN organization on the world of work and provides information and knowledge services on labour-related issues to ILO officials, ILO tripartite delegates and to general public. The ILO Library manages the repository of ILO publications (Labordoc) making ILO information accessible and discoverable to everybody.

Français

Fondée il y a cent ans, la bibliothèque de l'Organisation internationale du travail (OIT) soutient les activités de recherche et les travaux de l'OIT - l'organisation des Nations Unies sur le monde du travail - et fournit des services d'information et de connaissances sur les questions liées au travail aux fonctionnaires de l'OIT, aux délégués tripartites de l'OIT et au grand public. La bibliothèque de l'OIT gère le répertoire des publications du OIT (Labordoc) qui rend les informations du OIT accessibles et découvrables pour tout le monde.

Deutsch

Die vor hundert Jahren gegründete IAO-Bibliothek unterstützt die Forschungsaktivitäten und die Arbeit der IAO (Internationale Arbeitsorganisation), der UN-Organisation für die Arbeitswelt, und bietet IAO-Beamten, tripartiten Delegierten der IAO und der Öffentlichkeit Informationsservices zu arbeitsrechtlichen Fragen. Die IAO-Bibliothek verwaltet das Repository für IAO-Veröffentlichungen (Labordoc), wodurch IAO-Informationen für alle zugänglich und auffindbar werden.