

## INTRODUCTION

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The papers included in this special issue were prepared for a July 2002 workshop organized by the National Research Council (NRC) Committee on Monitoring International Labor Standards. Under contract with the U.S. Department of Labor, the NRC (the operating arm of The National Academies) established the committee in 2001. The committee was charged to identify and assess various sources of information on compliance with international labor standards, prepare a report, and create a database on standards and compliance.<sup>1</sup>

The papers in this issue focus on the availability and quality of information to measure progress toward achieving four core labor standards identified by the International Labor Organization (ILO). In the 1998 Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the 175 member nations of the ILO agreed to promote the following four core principles:

1. freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
2. the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor;
3. the effective abolition of child labor; and,
4. the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

These papers address information and indicators of progress toward achieving the four principles. Cornell University law instructor Lance Compa outlines the components of freedom of

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1. Copies of the committee's final report, MONITORING INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS: TECHNIQUES AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION are available at <http://www.nap.edu>; more information about the committee membership, activities, and other publications are available on the project Web site at <http://www7.nationalacademies.org/internationallabor/index.html>. The views expressed in this Introduction and the following articles are those of the authors alone. Although the articles are based on papers commissioned by the National Research Council Committee on Monitoring International Labor Standards, the articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Committee on Monitoring International Labor Standards, the National Research Council, or the National Academies.

association and collective bargaining that any compliance assessment should address, describes the pros and cons of using objective and subjective measures of compliance, and evaluates many sources of information. Kevin Bales, Director of Free the Slaves, describes the history of international standards outlawing slavery and forced labor, describes the challenges of obtaining accurate information on this illegal activity, and summarizes his approach to estimating levels of slavery and trafficking around the world. Constance Thomas, ILO Department of International Labor Standards, describes the ILO approach to supervising country implementation of anti-discrimination standards, and evaluates many sources of information on discrimination and efforts to eliminate it. Finally, former ILO staffer Amy R. Ritualo, along with U.S. Department of Labor colleagues Charita L. Castro and Sarah Gormly, describes alternative definitions used in surveys of child labor, assesses three major survey programs, and evaluates other information sources on child labor.

Two common themes emerge from the papers. First, obtaining accurate information is difficult because whether a labor standard has been violated may be a subject of dispute (as is often the case with freedom of association standards) and violators may operate underground (as is often the case in forced labor and the worst forms of child labor). Second, more field research is needed, including participant research, interviews with key informants, and surveys. Three of the four papers include specific suggestions for research to increase understanding of the extent and nature of violations of international labor standards around the world. Such improved understanding could inform design of policies and programs aimed at protecting workers and ensuring that they enjoy the fundamental rights outlined in the 1998 ILO Declaration.