

Decent work at the heart of UN development goals

At the September UN General Assembly in New York, Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon will present his report on the current MDGs and look ahead to post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One of the 17 proposed new goals includes full and productive employment and decent work for all, which is at the heart of the ILO's mandate and is critical to ending poverty. However, ILO priorities are reflected in many of the other 17 proposed new SDGs.

From the Millennium Development Goals to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda

The [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) were launched following the [2000 Millennium Summit](#) based on the report of the Secretary-General entitled, "[We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-First Century](#)". Additional input was prepared by the Millennium Forum, which brought together representatives of over 1,000 non-governmental and civil society organizations from more than 100 countries.

The [Millennium Declaration](#) contained the eight MDGs with their respective targets and indicators. The eight goals were to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality and empower women; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development.

The MDG framework has helped to focus development efforts and guide global and national development priorities since 2000. While three of the eight goals have been achieved by the final deadline, much work remains to be done ahead of 2015.



At the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 there was an agreement to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development

Key Resources

[The Millennium Development Goals](#)
[World of Work 2014: Developing with jobs](#)
[Post-2015 development process](#)
[Post 2015 Zero Draft](#)
[A new Global partnership](#)
[The 2012 Rio+20 outcome document](#)
[2012 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Declaration.](#)

Goals (SDGs), which would build upon the MDGs and converge with the post-2015 development agenda.

At the September [2010 MDG Summit](#), UN Member States initiated steps to advance the development agenda beyond



2015 and are now leading a process of open, inclusive consultations on the post-2015 agenda. Civil society organizations from all over the world have also begun to engage in the post-2015 process, while academia and research institutions, including think tanks, are particularly active.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has established a [UN System Task Team](#) to coordinate preparations for beyond 2015. In July 2012, he announced the creation of a [High-level Panel](#) as an advisory body. The work of the Panel will reflect new development challenges while also drawing on experience gained from the MDGs.

The ILO and the post-2015 agenda: Proposed SDG 8

The ILO has contributed to the post-2015 Development Agenda from the outset. It has participated in the UNDG Outreach Group, for which purpose the Employers' and Workers' groups of the Governing Body designated focal points. Within the [UN Country Teams](#) the ILO is drawing on its knowledge, experience and proven expertise to provide technical support and policy advice in various fields, including employment, the creation of enterprises and cooperatives, training for employability, and social protection.

In order to achieve the goal of [decent work](#) for all, the [Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals](#) (OWG, a 30-member group of the General Assembly preparing proposals on the SDGs) proposed in the [zero draft](#) a number of ambitious and time-

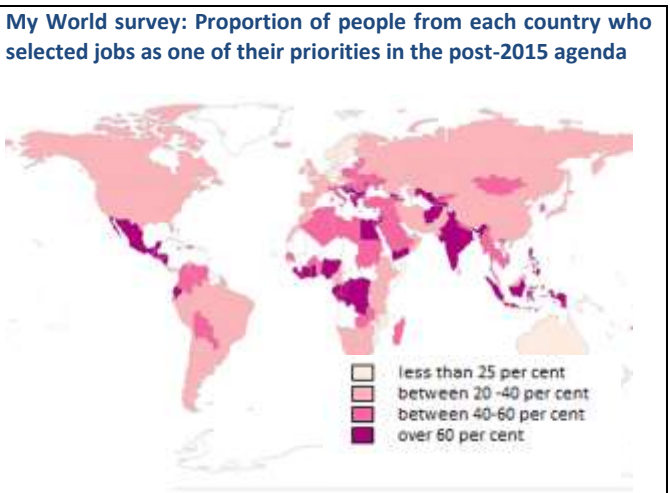
[The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post 2015 Development Agenda](#)
[Academy on Social and Solidarity Economy](#)
[ILO COOP survey on cooperatives and the post 2015 process](#)
[General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development](#)
[ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization](#)

bound targets to be accomplished by 2030, including: “to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.” To achieve this target, significant efforts will be needed to reduce the large numbers of the working poor, to increase employment rates for women, youth and people with disabilities, and to promote formalization and close the gender pay gap.

Special emphasis was given to youth. The OWG called for bold action to substantially reduce the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. To address these needs, the OWG suggested a global strategy to be developed and implemented by 2020.

The zero draft also proposes a target for the eradication of forced labour and the end of child labour in all its forms by 2025. According to the ILO, there are still [168 million child labourers](#) globally and [21 million victims of forced labour](#). The protection of labour rights and the promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers were also among the core targets proposed by the OWG. Safer workplaces and respect for labour rights are a fundamental step towards increasing global output and productivity and boosting inclusive growth. Finally, the OWG also called for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including [social protection floors](#), as a crucial and transformative target within the overarching goals related to poverty eradication and the promotion of equality.

Throughout the negotiations the ILO has provided technical assistance to the Member State-driven process through the UN Technical Support Team, which regularly solicits technical inputs from relevant UN agencies.



Economic growth, employment and decent work to create sustainable development

In a nutshell, better jobs do not mean lower growth and fewer jobs. Evidence from [ILO research](#) shows that good quality jobs matter for development.

There is real potential to enhance sustainable development by combining employment and decent work with economic growth under a single SDG, as proposed in the zero draft. Sustainable development requires attention to its multiple dimensions and linkages. For example, many poor people are already at work, but their chances of remaining poor are high. Significant progress under the new agenda will require a combination of policies to promote economic growth through productive investment and

private sector development, while ensuring that the jobs generated are decent – i.e., that they provide those who can access them with a genuine chance to escape poverty and do not fall back, with no one suffering discrimination on account of gender, age or other grounds. Balancing both sets of policies is important. They should be seen as mutually supportive and as such adequately reflected in the final formulation of the accompanying targets for the proposed SDG 8.

Employment and decent work in the post-2015 agenda. Why focus on employment, social protection and decent work for all?

Achieving decent work within the [post-2015 framework](#) should be seen as “[a dynamic process of successive improvements in wages, working conditions, labour institutions and standards of employment and social protection that is related to the structural transformation of an economy](#)”, a process that creates a virtuous circle of expanding inclusive growth, stronger job creation for men and women, and poverty eradication.



The post-2015 agenda should also reaffirm the international commitment to decent work as a fundamental human right. In their report on “[A new Global Partnership](#)”, the [High-level Panel](#) stressed that transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth had to be one of the main pillars of a transformative global development framework.

Addressing the jobs challenge is imperative to make the post-2015 agenda credible and relevant. There is a consensus that it should help meet the global demand for productive and decent jobs, but agreement is less clear on the priorities for action, the scope and impact of new initiatives and how to reflect them in goals and targets that are realistic, transformative, simple to communicate and measurable.

The ILO’s Governing Body called for the adoption of an explicit goal on employment, decent work and social protection. If action is dispersed across different goals and targets, it will be important to highlight the links between targets so as to avoid working in silos. However, the final choice of topics and goals will be made by the General Assembly.

The OWG’s 12th session proposed in the [zero draft](#) a sustainable development goal (SDG 8) whose aim is to “*promote strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all*”. Several illustrative targets specifically relating to employment and decent work are proposed under this goal, including full and productive employment and decent work for men and women; youth employment; SMEs and entrepreneurship; protection of worker’s rights, including migrants; combating child labour; and promoting employment formalization.

Why focus on employment, social protection and decent work for all?

1. *It is a global priority.* Between 2015 and 2030 about 670 million jobs will have to be created to contain the current spread of unemployment and cope with the growth in the working age population, where the quality of jobs, not just the quantity, is already at stake. Youth unemployment, informality, workers' rights and adequate social protection are still unsolved issues.

2. *It is a global commitment.* [The 2012 Rio+20 outcome document](#) recognized the need to create an enabling environment for full employment, decent work for all and social protection. This message was strengthened in the [2012 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Declaration](#).

3. *It addresses the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.* Jobs connect people to society, the economy and the environment. Significant steps toward more sustainable consumption and production will also require a framework where the environmental and jobs dimensions are tackled simultaneously

4. *It is universally applicable to all countries.* Job creation is a global concern. The quest for more and better jobs is a global common denominator for both developing and developed countries.



5. *It is transformational.* Development happens through jobs. Where jobs are scarce there is less growth, less security and less human and economic development.

6. *It builds on the MDGs.* In the current [MDG framework](#), MDG 1 aims to achieve full and productive employment and decent work. The OWG discussion highlighted that job creation is critical to poverty eradication, but most important it is the foundation for equitable, inclusive and sustainable economic transformation.

7. *It is measurable, easy to communicate and action-oriented.* In nearly all countries statistics on labour market and social protection are regularly collected and constantly monitored.

Whatever its configuration, strong and clear targets supported by reliable indicators and adequate means of implementation will be critical to ensuring success in addressing the jobs challenge.

Labour migration and the post-2015 agenda

The world of work needs to be adequately reflected in and mainstreamed into debates on international migration and development at the global, regional and



national levels. In November 2012 the ILO Governing Body called "to identify key priorities for substantive follow-up on the [United Nations General Assembly High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development](#), and to ensure that the promotion of effectively operating labour markets offering decent work becomes a central element in discussions on migration and development".

Given that a great part of international migration today concerns people who are economically active, the ILO considers international migration to be essentially about the search for productive employment, decent work and livelihoods, with the result that the world of work cuts across all three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental).

The zero draft contemplates, in SDG Goal 10, to "reduce inequality within and among countries", which involves the relation between migration and sustainable development. The future agenda for sustainable development needs to address protection challenges faced by migrant workers, such as those relating to their working conditions, wages, occupational safety and health, and migration status; improve labour market needs-assessments and other knowledge gaps concerning data on labour shortages and surpluses; and address the recognition of diplomas, qualifications and skills (e.g. see [ILO Guidelines for Development of Regional Model Competency Standards](#)); build a political consensus on the positive contribution of migrant workers to destination countries' economies; mainstream employment and labour rights in migration and development policies; and demonstrate the symbiotic relationships between these issues and sustainable development.

South- South and Triangular Cooperation as a tool for the SDGs

[South-South and triangular cooperation \(SSTC\)](#), is a major tool for reaching the goals and targets of the post-2015 agenda. SSTC is an effective means of capacity development, knowledge sharing,



exchanges of experience and good practice, and inter-regional cooperation, and as a means of mobilizing resources.

During the ILO's 2014 [Academy](#) on the theme of "Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE): Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Development", one of the main issues discussed was how SSE can contribute to the post-2015 development agenda; namely leaving no one behind, putting sustainable development at the core, and promoting employment-centred economic transformation, participation and good governance

The ILO and the other SDGs

So far the OWG has proposed [17 SDGs](#). The ILO's main participation would be in Goal 8: "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". However, additional illustrative target areas relating to employment, social protection and decent work are mentioned under other proposed SDGs.



[Social protection floors](#) and employment and decent work are mentioned under the proposed SDG 1 on poverty. SDG 4 on education has a specific target on [skill development](#) for youth and adults, including technical

and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Gender equality (SDG 5) calls implicitly on the provision of [decent work for women](#). Another example is the demand for decent industrial jobs and for a significant rise in industry's share of employment under SDG 9 on industrialization. The GDP share of labour income and migrant work as well as the promotion of economic, social and political inclusion are touched on in SDG 10 on equality. Under SDG 11, on cities and human settlements, ILO has expertise on [local economic and social development](#). SDG 16 on peace, the rule of law and institutions, addresses freedom of association.

The ILO's historic approach to social justice and respect for human rights, human dignity and the end of inequalities such as gender, as well as its expertise and knowledge in these areas, would be very useful in the achievement of these other goals, which have specific targets that are related to the principles and concepts that are at the core of the ILO's mission

Wide mobilization in support of decent work in the post-2015 framework

Several social actors are participating actively in the post-2015 process and focusing on the Decent Work Agenda.

Workers and trade unions have reassessed the importance of their participation in the promotion of sustainable development, since they are important partners in providing information, education and training on sustainability at all levels, including in the workplace, which are key to strengthening the capacity of workers and trade unions to support sustainable development. They have stressed the need for Member States of the United Nations to work together to design the means to ensure that the right to work; the right to equal pay for equal work; the right to form and join trade unions; and the right to social security – all enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – as well as the right to safe and healthy working conditions; the right to the improvement of all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene; and to the prevention, treatment and control of occupational diseases – all enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – are, finally, fully realized and universally enjoyed.

In addition to a global action campaign, a great number of national trade unions have been urging their governments to support the inclusion of decent work as a stand-alone sustainable development goal.

The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities organized a "Trade Union Strategy Workshop on the Post-2015 Development Agenda" in June 2014, which brought together trade union leaders from all regions to make concrete proposals for the Open Working Group.

The International Organisation of Employers, (IOE) has been active within the Global Business Alliance, to reinforce the contribution of business to sustainable development.

The [International Cooperative Alliance \(ICA\)](#) and the ILO have launched an initiative on the contribution of cooperatives to sustainable development. An [online survey](#) was carried out through [the ILO COOP website](#). The purpose of the survey was to find out how the cooperative business model is contributing towards achieving sustainable development and how actors in the cooperative movement perceive the debate around the post-2015 development framework and their role in this debate. There is interest among the cooperative movement in the post-2015 process; around half of the 290 respondents participated in the consultation process. The respondents identified ending poverty and creating jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth, as those SDGs were cooperatives with the greatest potential to contribute.

Among faith-based organizations, support is also strong for the inclusion of decent work within the post-2015 agenda. On 9 May, addressing Mr Ban Ki Moon and the leading executive officers of agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations and specialized organisations (CEB), Pope Francis asked that the future SDGs have "a real impact on the structural causes of poverty, hunger, to ensure decent and productive work for all". Pope Francis reiterated the same appeal in his message to the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2014. A wide range of catholic organizations gathered in Rome under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace expressed the same support. During the ILC, Rev Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, speaking on behalf of 340 Churches, expressed similar support.



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