Responding to the call for dignity at work, for voice and participation and for societies built on respect for human rights is central to supporting the transition to stable and peaceful democracies in the Arab states.

Together with our tripartite partners – governments, workers and employers – the ILO Regional Office for Arab states works to foster social justice with decent work opportunities through sustainable enterprises, higher productivity and growth with equity.

We do this through working towards the four strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda:

- **creating jobs**
- **extending social protection**
- **increasing social dialogue**
- **guaranteeing rights at work**

The ILO response to the challenge of decent work in the Arab region is anchored in the principles of the Global Jobs Pact, the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the Arab Decade for Employment (2010-2020) and the Arab Action Agenda for Employment.

The ILO’s funding base consists of regular budget contributions provided by all member States by virtue of their membership in the ILO; unearmarked voluntary contributions that are allocated as needed in a flexible manner by the ILO; and earmarked voluntary contributions for specific projects with a clear timeline and a pre-defined focus.

For the 2010-2011 biennium, the ILO Regional Office for the Arab States received a $13.5 million regular budget allocation, US$15.9 million in earmarked voluntary contributions (70 per cent of which was raised by the Beirut office) and US$2 million in unearmarked voluntary contributions. ROAS has witnessed a steady increase in its earmarked voluntary contributions since 2008, with an average US$9.7 million raised annually over the last four years.
Guaranteeing rights at work

The ILO maintains and develops a system of international labour standards aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. The ILO’s supervisory bodies provide guidance on the implementation of international labour standards through technical cooperation and a rights-based approach to development.

The Regional Office for the Arab States works to enhance the awareness and capacity of tripartite partners to effectively act on their commitment to ILS and to address gaps at the country level. ROAS also systematically integrates international labour standards into national and regional programming processes.
Raising awareness A long-term programme of strengthening workers’ organizations in Arab States through socioeconomic and legal literacy aims to respond to the needs of workers and their organizations in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Syria, Yemen, and the occupied Palestinian territory. The programme includes the design and validation of a socioeconomic and legal literacy training programme; the development and dissemination of policy and issue briefs on priority issues to inform labour leaders; and the training of trainers. This project supports partnerships such as with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition, the ILO has trained 12,000 women and men in Yemen as part of an initiative to integrate gender equality concerns into labour market governance.

Strengthening Engagement ILO support has resulted in the establishment of tripartite committees to support Decent Work Country Programme implementation in Oman and Jordan; the increased employment of women in the occupied Palestinian territory; and the reintegration of workers and the improvement of workplace relations in Bahrain. In Jordan, amendments to the national labour law allowing migrant workers to join the garment union have contributed to a tripling of the number of factories with employees who are represented by the garment union.

Supporting Small Business Many of Arab economies rely heavily on small enterprises. The ILO has been engaged in projects in Jordan and Oman with employer organizations to support the development of training programmes and policies that strengthen micro, small and medium enterprises. In the occupied Palestinian territory, ILO support has assisted in the creation of a sustainable and inclusive private sector development strategy for MSMEs and the improved provision of market-based services to the business community.

Promoting Social Dialogue

Social dialogue plays a critical role in achieving the ILO’s objective of advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. Social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest.

Social dialogue and the practice of tripartism between governments and the representative organizations of workers and employers within and across borders are now more relevant to achieving solutions and to building up social cohesion and the rule of law through, among other means, international labour standards

ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization

Arab Regional Conference on Social Dialogue

The Arab world’s first-ever Regional Conference on Social Dialogue was held in Rabat in December 2010. Co-organized by the ILO and the Arab Labor Organization, the three-day conference concluded with a commitment to strengthening national frameworks for social dialogue through mobilizing resources, prioritizing social dialogue in projects with the ILO, enacting legislative reform, launching awareness-raising campaigns, empowering employers’ and workers’ groups, addressing informal work conditions and adopting a rights-based approach in line with international conventions.
Improving Social Security

Pensions, unemployment protection and maternity protection are three important policy areas in the Arab region. The ILO has assisted Bahrain to develop an unemployment insurance scheme and is working with other Arab states to develop similar schemes.

Jordan, in 2010, adopted a maternity insurance scheme proposed by the ILO that shifted the responsibility for funding women’s salaries during their maternity leave from individual employers to social insurance. This collaboration between the ILO and Jordan has supported pension reforms and an initiative to develop a comprehensive Social Protection Floor. In addition to providing support for pension reform, an ILO review addressed the introduction of universal healthcare in Lebanon through a study of policy options, a survey of Lebanese households, and a comprehensive report presenting a costing study for the consideration of the tripartite partners. Similarly, the ILO has supported Saudi Arabia with a financial assessment and the drafting of new legislation to assist the unemployed.

Protecting Migrant Worker Rights

An ILO initiative assisted Jordan in the introduction of new legislation permitting migrant workers to join trade unions and led to the creation of a Migration Department. Domestic workers in Lebanon have been the beneficiaries of ILO interventions including the introduction of a ‘unified contract’, the monitoring of private recruitment agencies and proposals for revisions to the labour law for their inclusion.

Social protection is a foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth

2,300 people were surveyed by the ILO in Kuwait and UAE as part of a study on migrant workers.
Employment creating jobs

Labour Force Surveys The ILO conducted a nationwide labour force survey interviewing 2,800 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, as part of an advocacy campaign on the right to work, and assisted the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in Yemen in undertaking its first labour force survey in over a decade.

Influencing National Policy An ILO programme of skills development to support employment generation in Iraq has enabled the development of a national employment policy. In the occupied Palestinian territory, the ILO helped to reactivate the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection to support active labour market policies and job creation measures. In line with the Global Jobs Pact, a rapid labour market assessment was carried out in Jordan, examining the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on Jordan and exploring policy responses.

Strengthening Skills In Gaza, the ILO provided support to UNRWA to reform its programme for overage students towards competency based curricula, structured apprenticeships and improved training and assessment methodology. In south Lebanon, ILO’s intervention led to government endorsement of a new national vocational training curriculum for the construction sector.

Developing skills among the disabled A skills development programme in the occupied Palestinian territory targeted the large number of young Palestinians with disabilities and special needs who are dropping out of schools early on. The project provided them with technical and vocational training and donated equipment to the Sheikhha Fatima Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Hebron with funds from the Islamic Development Bank. In Oman, the ILO supported persons with disabilities through technical assistance for labour market inclusion and laying the groundwork for a national training and placement agency.

Fostering entrepreneurship The ILO’s Know About Business (KAB) entrepreneurship-awareness training has been introduced in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Yemen, Iraq and Syria; with local trainers certified in the oPt, Iraq and Lebanon. KAB training has been integrated into national training curricula in Syria, Yemen, Oman and the oPt.

Green Jobs The ILO supported efforts to mainstream green jobs into the UN Development Assistance Framework through skills upgrading for green jobs in Syria, especially for young people. In Lebanon, the ILO assessed the potential for green jobs in key economic sectors, in particular in energy, construction, waste management and agriculture. In 2011, the ILO produced the study “Towards Sustainable Construction and Green Jobs in the Gaza Strip” and teamed up with UNRWA to provide safe housing and livelihood opportunities to vulnerable families in Gaza.

Over 100,000 students and trainees have undertaken the Know About Business programme in Syria, where it has been integrated into the national curriculum.

Global Employment Agenda

The ILO identifies policies that help to create and maintain decent work and income; policies that are formulated in a comprehensive Global Employment Agenda worked out by the ILO constituents – governments, employers and workers. The Agenda aims to place employment at the heart of economic and social policies. Through the creation of productive employment, it seeks to better the lives of people who are either unemployed or whose remuneration from work is inadequate to allow them and their families to escape from poverty.