



► Shaping the Living Wage Agenda in Asia and the Pacific – A high level regional dialogue under the Global Coalition for Social Justice (23 September 2025, Colombo, Sri Lanka)

Background

On 13 March 2024, the ILO Governing Body endorsed the agreement reached by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the issue of the living wage during the [Meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages](#) (February 2024). In line with the ILO Constitution and the Philadelphia Declaration, and consistent with the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the ILO denotes that the concept of the living wage is:

- the wage level that is necessary to afford a decent standard of living for workers and their families, taking into account the country circumstances and calculated for the work performed during the normal hours of work;
- calculated in accordance with the ILO's principles of estimating the living wage, as outlined below;
- to be achieved through the wage-setting process in line with ILO principles on wage setting.

In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of living wage initiatives, including by multinational enterprises, individually or as part of a multi-stakeholder initiative. These initiatives present different degrees of advancement, and they have given significant visibility to the concepts of living wage and living income. However, as stated in the ILO conclusions, many of these initiatives do not yet take into account ILO principles of wage setting, particularly tripartite social dialogue and/or collective bargaining nor do they take into account other national institutions involved in such determination such as minimum wage boards/committees/commissions. Local context, and root causes of low pay, as well as economic factors are also not always considered, particularly in operationalizing living wages. The conclusions also provide the ILO with a mandate to assist its constituents in estimating and operationalizing living wages within the broader wage-setting processes, as well as in engaging with living wage initiatives to promote alignment with ILO living wage principles.

As a follow-up to the adoption of the tripartite agreement on living wages, living wage initiatives was included as a thematic area under the lists of key interventions of the [Global Coalition for Social Justice](#) and a kick off meeting was held on April 10, 2025, involving members of the Coordinating Group, employers' and worker's organisations, multinational companies and other stakeholders. Subsequently, on 16 April 2025, first ever [ILO programme on living wages](#) was launched by the heads of ILO, ITUC and IOE. The programme has two pillars and will support ILO constituents : (a) to develop living wage estimates in line with ILO principles and to access information on wages; and (b) to operationalize living wages in line with ILO wage-setting principles, including by strengthening wage-setting institutions, taking into account needs of workers and their families as well as economic factors, and by addressing the root causes and challenges of low pay. To implement its new mandate, the ILO organised a global event on "Operationalising Living Wages" under the Global Coalition for Social Justice during 28-29 April 2025. This event witnessed participation from diverse groups of actors and provided a forum to learn from the experiences of governments, social partners and living wage initiatives in estimating and operationalizing living wages.

Following the above global event on living wages, a Regional Living Wage Dialogue involving constituents and other stakeholders planned on 23 September 2025 in Colombo under the Global Coalition for Social Justice. The regional event will provide a forum for ILO Constituents to interact with partners, exchange information, discuss the ILO living wages principles and explore avenues to further promote alignment with ILO living wages principles and national frameworks. The dialogue will allow the ILO to share information about the ILO Conclusions of the meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages, and raise awareness of ILO guidance on wage policies, learn from experiences of governments, social partners, and living wage initiatives in estimating and operationalizing living wages in line with ILO Conclusions; and exchange information on existing living wage initiatives and activities in the region, including ILO's work. It will also provide an opportunity to ILO to discuss mechanisms to strengthen wage-setting processes including launch the Asia-Pacific Digital Repository System for Minimum Wages, as part of

the ILO wage data hub. The digital repository is a new online platform developed by the ILO to support wage-setting institutions – particularly wage boards/committees/commissions – by centralizing official minimum wage data and other indicators enabling more transparent, consistent, and informed approaches to facilitate wage setting mechanisms.

Objective

► To promote and share information on the ILO living wage principles

The event and ensuing discussions will be an opportunity to share information on the ILO Conclusions from the [Meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages](#), to learn from the experiences of governments, social partners and living wage initiatives in estimating and operationalizing living wages, and to exchange information on existing initiatives and activities. The event will also be used to discuss mechanisms to strengthen wage-setting processes and explore ways to ensure that living wage initiatives integrated into national frameworks align with ILO principles.

The meeting will further be an opportunity to identify the needs of constituents in terms of technical assistance that the Office could provide to support alignment with the ILO methodology on estimating living wages, as well as on economic factors, with a view to operationalising them.

► Participants

- The event will encompass a diverse group of participants from the Asia-Pacific region, including representatives from the ILO; government representatives; workers' and employer's organisations; experts from other UN agencies, members of the multilateral systems and development partners; private sector and business representatives; academia, civil society and existing living wage initiatives. In addition, the event will invite the participation of high-level authorities—particularly Labour Ministers from four to five countries which have taken notable steps to promote living wages. Participants will include constituents from the 16 countries (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, China, Viet Nam, Lao P.D.R., the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji) which includes 10 countries where ILO is working intensively on minimum wage and living wage issues and two countries, where the ILO Setting Adequate Wages (SAW) Project is currently under implementation.
- Additional participants will include members of the Global Coalition for Social Justice and organisations/institutions including Sri Lanka based ones that could be interested to join it.

► Date and Venue

- **Dates:** 23 September 2025
- **Venue:** Hotel Cinnamon Life at the City of Dreams – The Forum Ballroom (level 8)
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Methodology

The event will be hybrid (presential and virtual) facilitated by ILO experts to facilitate fruitful discussions. Sessions will feature panel discussions on specific components of the ILO conclusions. These will be followed by open discussions with the audience, who will have an open opportunity to interact with the panellists and contribute to the conversation.

Panellists will be asked tailored questions and invited to contribute specific country experiences to promote peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.

Agenda

Tuesday, 23 September 2025

08:30 – 09:00	Registration
09:00 – 10:00	Session 1: High Level Inauguration of the <i>Regional Event on Living Wages</i> and the Launch of the Digital Repository System for Minimum Wages and Living Wages Lighting of the Ceremonial Lamp National Anthem of Sri Lanka Welcoming and Introductory Remarks <i>Delivered by Ms. Kaori Nakamura-Osaka</i> Assistant Director General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, ILO Special Address Delivered via Video Message <i>Delivered by H.E. Mr. Gilbert F. Houngbo</i> Director General, ILO Inaugural Address <i>Delivered by H.E. Mr. Anil Jayantha Fernando</i> Minister of Labour, Sri Lanka Announcement of Sri Lankan partners joining the Global Coalition for Social Justice Launch - Asia-Pacific Minimum Wage Digital Repository System Expression of Appreciation <i>Delivered by Ms. Joni Simpson</i> Director, Country Office for Sri Lanka and Maldives, ILO <i>Moderator – Master of Ceremony</i>
10:00 – 11:00	Session 2: ILO Conclusion on Wage Policies, including Living Wages High-Level Discussion <i>Moderated by Mr. Patrick Belser</i> Chief Inclusive Labour Market, Inclusive Labour Markets, Wages and Working Conditions Branch, ILO Mr. Daniel Kostzer Chief Economist, International Trade Union Confederation Mr. Luis Rodrigo Morales Director of Policy and ILO Coordination, International Organisation of Employers Mr. Alok Mishra (remote) Joint Secretary, Minister of Labour and Employment, India Ms. Nguyen Huyen Le Head of the Wages Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Viet Nam This session provides an opportunity to reflect on the content and significance of the ILO 2024 Conclusions on “wage policies, including living wages,” and to consider how these can be translated into practical support for member States in the Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on high-level perspectives from the Government, ITUC, IOE and ILO the

discussion will underscore the importance of addressing persistent inequality and low wages, while reinforcing wage-setting institutions and promoting ILO principles on living wages. The session will also introduce the ILO's first ever Living Wage Programme, launched in 2024. Taken together, these elements open concrete pathways for the Asia-Pacific region to reinforce minimum wage systems, expand collective bargaining, identify and address the root causes of low pay, and foster more inclusive social dialogue—ultimately advancing the broader goals of social justice and inclusive growth.

11:00 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 12:30 **Session 3: Principles of Estimating Living Wages**

High-Level Discussion
*Moderated by **Mr. Anoop Satpathy***
Wage Specialist, ILO

Mr. Benedicto Ernesto R. Bitonio, Jr.
Under Secretary, Department of Labor and Employment, Philippines

Mr. Marcel Vernooij
Director, Public Sector Engagement, Global Director Living Wage and Living Income, IDH – Sustainable Trade Initiative

Dr. Murray Hall
Senior Research Scientist, Sustainability Program, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Agriculture and Food

Prof. Mohit Sharma
Lead-Evaluation, Quest Alliance

This session provides an opportunity to explore the principles of estimating living wages and their practical application in diverse national and sectoral contexts. It offers a platform to discuss how methodologies aligned to ILO principles can inform credible, transparent and robust estimates. The dialogue will highlight the way these estimates can better inform wage setting institutions; also translating living wage principles into real improvements for workers and enterprises. By engaging governments, employers, workers, and international partners, the session will foster collaboration on building standardized frameworks, equipping social partners with data, and advancing concrete measures to close the gap between prevailing wages and living wages.

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 14:30 **Session 4: Importance of Taking into Account Economic Factors and Root Causes of Low-Pay**

High-Level Discussion
*Moderated by **Ms. Giulia De Lazzari***
Economist, Wages INWORK, ILO

Mr. Sopheana Bronh
Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of National Council for Minimum Wage of Cambodia

Mr. Saidul Islam
Additional Secretary General, Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF)

Mr. Sailesh Naidu
Assistant National Secretary, Fiji Trades Union Congress, Fiji

Prof. Arief Anshory Yusuf

Member of the National Economic Council, Indonesia

This session provides an opportunity to examine how economic factors, and the root causes of low pay should be integrated into the operationalization of living wages. It offers a platform to discuss how minimum wage setting, guided by Convention No. 131, balances the needs of workers and their families with broader economic realities such as productivity, cost of living, and informality. The dialogue will encourage to understand the underlying economic conditions, market dynamics, and structural factors that contribute to low wages. Therefore, operationalizing living wages requires a strategic and gradual approach fostering social dialogue among policymakers, employers, and workers' representatives to identify effective interventions. Such a dialogue ensures that living wage strategies are informed by evidence, context-sensitive, and capable of promoting inclusive sustainable growth and social justice.

14:30 – 15:30

Session 5: Operationalizing Living Wages: the Role of Wage Setting Institutions (minimum wages and collective bargaining)

High-Level Discussion

Moderated by Mr. Xavier Estupinan

Wage Specialist, ILO

Mr. Abdul Rahim Abdul Razak

Deputy Secretary of the National Wages Consultative Council (NWCC), Malaysia

Mr. K. Marimuttu

Chief Legal Advisor, Ceylon Workers Congress, Sri Lanka

Ms. Tran Thi Hong Lien

Deputy Director General, Bureau for Employers' Activities, Viet Nam Chamber of commerce and Industry, Viet Nam

Prof. Jim Arrowsmith – (remote)

Massey Business School (MBS) in Auckland, New Zealand

This session provides an opportunity to explore how living wages can be operationalized through strong wage-setting institutions, including statutory minimum wages and collective bargaining. It offers a platform to examine how ILO principles of wage determination—balancing the needs of workers and their families with economic factors—can guide evidence-based wage-setting that is inclusive, adaptable, and grounded in social dialogue. Participants will discuss the role of tripartite wage councils/boards, the importance of institutionalizing collective bargaining as a right, and the need for sectoral approaches that reflect diverse labour market realities. By bringing together perspectives from governments, employers, and workers, the dialogue will highlight how institutions can ensure that living wages are not just aspirational benchmarks, but tangible elements that inform wage setting processes, to determine adequate wages that improve livelihoods, and promote sustainable enterprises.

15:30 – 15:35

Special Statement - H.E. Dr. Ali Haidar Ahmed, Minister of Higher Education, Labour and Skills Development, Republic of Maldives

15:35 – 16:00

Break

16:00 – 17:00

Session 6: Operationalizing Living Wages: the perspective of private actors and multi-stakeholders' initiatives

Panel Discussion

Moderated by Mr. Nicolas Maitre

Economist, Research Unit, ILO

Video Message from Ms. Megan Galvin

Corporate Sustainability Manager, U.N. Global Compact

Mr. Matteo Squire (remote)

Global Sustainability Manager, Unilever

Ms. Mira Neumaier

Executive Director, ACT (Action, Collaboration, Transformation)

Ms. Véronique Rochet (remote)

Senior Director Sustainability, PUMA

Mr. Rolf Blaser

CEO and Managing Director - A. Baur & Company (Pvt.) Ltd.

This session provides an opportunity to explore how private actors and multi-stakeholder initiatives can contribute to operationalizing living wages, while ensuring alignment with ILO wage-setting principles. It offers a platform to discuss how companies and global initiatives are integrating living wage commitments into their operations and supply chains, and how these efforts can be strengthened through social dialogue, collective bargaining, and closer connection to national wage-setting institutions. The session will highlight the potential of collaboration to avoid fragmented approaches, the role of data and standardized frameworks in building credibility, and the importance of ensuring that living wage initiatives follow ILO principles, responsive to local realities and economic factors, while addressing the root causes of low pay. The discussion will focus on how to move from voluntary commitments toward systemic change that benefits workers, businesses, and economies across sectors and borders.

17:00 – 18:00

Session 7: Development Partner Dialogue on Initiatives on Living Wages

Panel Discussion

Moderated by **Ms. Michiko Miyamoto**

Director of Decent Work Technical Team for South Asia, ILO

Ms. Charlotte Bernhard

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands

Ms. Cheng Boon Ong

Decent Work Programme Manager - Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

Ms. Annika Wandscher, LL.M. (remote)

Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany

Ms. Nandini Krishnan

Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice – World Bank

Mr. Kiril Iordanov

Senior Program Officer. Global Affairs Canada

This session provides an opportunity for development partners to share perspectives and initiatives that support the advancement of living wage agendas in the Asia-Pacific region. The dialogue will serve as a space to exchange experiences on how development cooperation, policy engagement, and financial support can support sectoral, national and regional efforts to strengthening wage setting institutions and operationalize living wages in line with ILO principles. It will also highlight opportunities for coordination among governments, international organizations, and development partners to ensure

coherence across initiatives, avoid duplication, and build synergies that amplify impact. The session will explore how international collaboration can contribute to reducing inequality, promoting sustainable enterprises and labour commitments in trade agreements, and advancing social justice across the region.

18:00 – 18:30

Session 8: Closing

Closing Remarks

*Delivered by **Ms. Kaori Nakamura-Osaka***

Assistant Director General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, ILO

Valedictory Address

*Delivered by **H.E. Mr. Mahinda Jayasinghe***

Deputy Minister of Labour, Sri Lanka

Vote of Thanks

*Delivered by **Mr. Marc-Andre Franche***

UN Resident Coordinator, Sri Lanka

18:30 – 19:30

Cultural Event

19:30 – 21:00

Dinner
