

The ILO in Bangladesh



Key Facts and Figures

Population: 142 million

- 49 per cent female
- 51 per cent male

Annual population growth rate: 1.3 per cent.

Labour force: 57 million

- 64 per cent male
- 36 per cent female

Annual labour force growth rate: 3.4 per cent

Annual number of entrants to the labour force: 1.8 million

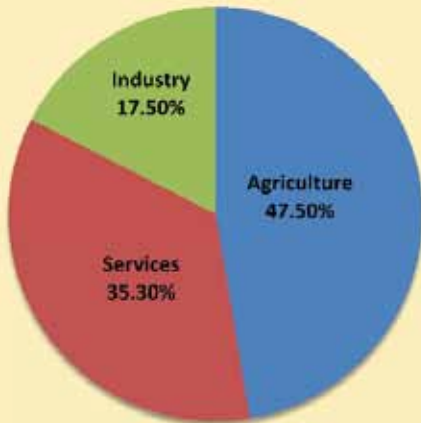
Unemployment rate: 4.6 per cent

Underemployment rate: 20 per cent

With about 964 inhabitants per square km, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Due to a combination of demographics, economics and geography it remains one of the least developed economies, with a per capita income of US\$755.

Bangladesh has achieved a respectable GDP growth rate, averaging 6 per cent per annum for the last two decades. As a result the percentage of people below the poverty line has been declined from approximately 57 per cent (1992) to just over 31 per cent (2010), and the country aims to reach middle-income status by 2021.

Employment by sector



The proportion of young people (aged 15-35) and those in the economically active age group creates a potential “demographic dividend” for Bangladesh which can be unlocked through the creation of decent, productive work.

However, challenges remain. Demographics mean the labour force is growing quickly. While a structural shift of employment from agriculture to services and industry is steadily underway, agriculture still constitutes a large share of GDP and employs almost half of the labour force. The most telling indication of the slow pace of economic modernisation is the large informal economy which absorbs nearly 88 per cent of the labour force. This overwhelmingly large informal employment is mostly characterized by low productive, low pay and precarious jobs. Unemployment and underemployment are high, particularly among young people.

Though women make up half of the population, only about a third of them are in the labour market. Their entry into the labour force is mainly due to rapid growth of the ready-made garment industries which directly employ about 3.5 million workers of whom an estimated 80 per cent are female.

All figures from the Bangladesh Decent Work Country Programme 2012-2015

The ILO - Who We Are

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the UN specialized agency dealing with work and workplace issues, and related rights and standards. Its overarching goal is to achieve decent work for all, so everyone benefits from working conditions that offer freedom, equity, security and human dignity. In working towards this goal, the ILO has four strategic objectives:

- To promote and realize standards, and fundamental principles and rights at work.
- To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment.
- To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all.
- To strengthen the relationship between workers, employers and governments, and encourage social dialogue.

Founded in 1919, the ILO is the only surviving major creation of the Treaty of Versailles, which established the League of Nations. It became the first specialized agency of the United Nations in 1946.

The ILO in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has been a member State of the ILO since 22 June 1972 and has ratified 33 ILO Conventions including seven out of the eight core conventions. The ILO opened its office in Dhaka on 25 June 1973.

The Bangladesh Decent Work Country Programme for 2012-2015 is being implemented in close co-operation with ILO's tripartite constituents - the Government and employers' and workers' organizations. Five priority areas include:

- Generating productive employment with improved sustainable enterprises and skills Development.
- Fundamental principles and rights at work promoted and implemented through effective social dialogue.
- Extending social protection to the workers and their families, including migrant workers.
- Strong and representative employers and workers organization influencing economic, social and government policies.
- Ratification and application of International Labour Standards.



Current Areas of Work

ILO's current portfolio of projects includes diversified fields. In the wake of the Tazreen factory fire in 2012 and Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013, the office increased its focus on improving working conditions and safety in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. A major three and a half-year ILO programme, has been drawn to support the National Tripartite Plan of Action on Fire Safety and Structural Integrity in the RMG sector. This programme aims to provide:

- Technical support for the efforts of the Government, employers' and workers' organizations to improve working conditions and safety, including fire safety and structural integrity assessments, strengthening of labour inspection systems.
- Education and training on occupational safety and health and fundamental principles and rights at work.
- Rehabilitation and skills training for victims of previous factory workplace accidents.
- A Better Work programme for Bangladesh.

The ILO also provides technical assistance and plays an important coordination role in other initiatives being taken by international brands, retailers and unions to improve safety and working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

A number of other existing projects and activities have synergies with the RMG Programme, including:

- The technical and vocational education and training reform project (TVET), which contributes to improving skills and employability.
- Promoting Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in Bangladesh (FPRW).
- Promotion of a national policy on occupational safety and health, gender equality and ending discrimination at work.
- Formalization of informal employment through regulatory and policy incentives and job-growth strategies.
- Support to national initiatives to combat child labour.
- Improving the capacity of the government, employers and workers organizations.
- Programme for combating trafficking and promoting decent work for migrant domestic and RMG workers.
- Protecting overseas workers through safe migration.

Other important ILO Dhaka initiatives include promoting green jobs, reducing wage discrimination, building the capacities of indigenous and tribal peoples and assessing the links between international trade and employment.

Social Partners

The ILO, together with the Government of Bangladesh, employers' and workers' organizations, works towards promoting decent and productive employment opportunities for women and men in Bangladesh. In addition, the ILO cooperates with many other key actors in civil society, academic and research institutions, the private sector and the media.

As a part of the UN system in Bangladesh, the ILO supports the Government of Bangladesh in implementing its 6th Five Year Plan, (2011-2015), and in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Our development partners include the European Union, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The Asia Pacific Decent Work Decade

The International Labour Organization's members in Asia and the Pacific - governments, employers' and workers' organizations - have committed themselves to an "Asia-Pacific Decent Work Decade 2006-2015". In doing so, they reaffirmed their commitment to achieving full, productive and decent employment for their people. To help realize the aims of the Decade five regional priority areas were selected:

- Competitiveness, productivity and jobs,
- Labour market governance,
- Youth employment,
- Managing labour migration,
- Local development for poverty reduction.

These priorities compliment each member country's individual goals, which are outlined in their national Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs). In turn, these DWCP's shape the ILO's work with its member States and so support the Organization's mandated aim, of Decent Work for All.

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A better world starts here.