



Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in the Cotton Supply Chain: RISE for Impact – A New Phase, A New Vision

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A woman cotton picker is working in the field of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. © ILO

► At a glance



Partners

Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (MOPHRD), Labour Departments of Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh, Ministry of Agriculture, Employers' and Workers' organizations, UN agencies, business associations, media, civil society and other actors involved in the cotton supply chain.



Donor

Industria de Diseño Textil, S.A (INDITEX)



Duration

2 March 2023 - 2 March 2026



Target beneficiaries

Cotton producing communities (farmers, workers and their families), Government, provincial departments and other agencies, employers' and workers' organizations, and civil society organizations.



Geographical focus

Major cotton producing provinces of Pakistan (Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan) with a focus on specific districts.

► Background

Pakistan is the fifth leading producer of cotton in the world with a significant growth potential. The cultivation of cotton is an indispensable source of income for thousands of small-holder farmers and agricultural workers in Pakistan. It plays a critical role in international trade, attracting export revenues. This makes the sector a key contributor towards reaching targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provided labour rights are respected.

Most agricultural workers, those employed in cotton cultivation have informal work arrangements that do not guarantee their labour rights. Many of them are seasonal migrants recruited and transported by labour intermediaries. Their lack of access to credit and health insurance makes them more vulnerable in times of crisis. Exposure to chemical fertilizers and pesticides creates serious health hazards for farm workers. It is mainly women who harvest cotton, but yet there is a persistent gap between wages paid to male and female workers. Labourers are unorganized and lack the power to bargain for fair wages and to advocate for compliance with Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW): freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and a safe and healthy working environment.

The ILO and INDITEX, one of the world's largest fashion retailers, entered into a partnership in 2017 to promote an integrated approach to FPRW in the cotton supply chain in target countries. Under this first phase, the project developed two scalable models for the promotion of FPRW in the cotton supply chain. In particular, in Pakistan, the project implemented a "bottom-up" approach, called the community model, engaging directly with the cotton growing communities and up to Labour Departments. Backed by this success, they decided to extend their partnership for a second phase. This new, three-year project (Phase II) will operate in Pakistan, India and Uzbekistan as well as at the global level.

INDITEX supports the ILO in promoting respect for labour rights, social dialogue, worker well-being and empowerment in selected cotton-growing areas of these three countries.

► Objective

To scale up the community model developed under the first phase of the project, in order to foster a partnership approach among the actors for enhanced respect for FPRW in cotton growing communities and a sustainable cotton supply chain in Pakistan.

► Main activities

This project will contribute to promoting decent work in the cotton supply chain by strengthening the implementation of all five FPRWs in Pakistan. It will also support social dialogue at the global, industry, workplace and community level to support a viable system of industrial relations. This will be done through:

- Conducting studies and mappings to improve the knowledge base on FPRW.
- Developing and implement a strategy to eliminate gender discrimination at farm level.
- Awareness raising campaigns on FPRW for cotton growing communities and local stakeholders.
- Capacity building on FPRW for cotton growing communities and other key stakeholders.
- Advocating with and mobilizing policymakers to include agricultural workers in the scope of protection of the laws and policies as relevant, including to give them access to social protection and ensure their organizations can be officially registered.
- Analysing relevant policies and programmes of the government and social partners on FPRW, and closing the identified gaps as appropriate.

- Capacity-building of financial and insurance service providers on social finance and health insurance schemes to cover rural farmers and workers.
- Facilitating formation of local organizations of farmers and workers and support them in engaging in constructive social dialogue.
- Promoting social dialogue on FPRW at national and global level.

► Project outcomes

1. Cotton growing communities are better aware and empowered to assert FPRW.
2. Institutions (ILO constituents and other stakeholders) are capacitated to realize FPRW for cotton growing communities in a sustainable manner.
3. Global stakeholders have better access to knowledge and tools to promote FPRW in cotton growing communities.



A group of cotton pickers is working in the field of Sanghar District, Sindh, Pakistan. © ILO

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► Contact details:

ILO Country Office for Pakistan
ILO Building, Sector G-5/2 (Near State Bank of Pakistan)
Islamabad, Pakistan
T: +9251226456-8
E: islamabad@ilo.org
W: www.ilo.org/islamabad



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