Panel: Trade, employment and sustainable development: Advancing human and labour rights

Thursday, 15 June 2023, 3–4.30 p.m.

International trade can be an engine of inclusive growth, poverty eradication and economic development, and can contribute to the promotion of inclusive and sustainable development, structural transformation and industrialization, particularly in developing countries. Universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading systems, in which all countries respect, promote and realize the ILO’s fundamental principles and rights at work, will be a catalyst for increased incomes, the creation of employment and improved working conditions, the promotion of sustainable enterprises and increasing the fair distribution of value-added along supply chains.

Current dynamics in global trade, including those related to multiple crises, present new challenges for the effective implementation of policies to advance shared prosperity from trade and investment. There are also concerns about countries with limited capacity to implement and enforce national laws, especially on how this affects micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as low-skilled workers, women and workers operating in the informal economy. Such concerns have led to initiatives across regions and within countries to strengthen the linkages between trade and broader socio-economic objectives. These initiatives, at both the micro and the macro levels, include the promotion of and respect for human and labour rights through trade and investment policies, due diligence legislation and responsible business practices.

This panel will explore policy solutions and partnerships to enhance the social dimensions of trade, in particular trade, industrial and sectoral policies that promote decent work, enhance productivity and contribute to the transition from the informal to the formal economy. It will examine the potential of new initiatives – including through social dialogue and ILO collaboration with multilateral development banks and other international organizations – to advance socially fair trade, for example through provisions based on international labour standards in trade and investment arrangements, responsible business conduct, investment frameworks and development cooperation.