The ILO in Bangladesh
KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

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

However, challenges remain for this rapidly growing labour force. While a structural shift of employment from agriculture to services and industry is steadily underway, the agricultural sector 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 contributes to 85.1 per cent of the labour force, and is mostly characterized by low productive, low pay and precarious jobs.

Unemployment and underemployment are high, particularly among young Bangladeshis. 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 the rapid growth of the ready-made garment industry which directly employs about four million workers of whom an estimated 60 per cent are women.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations agency for the world of work. Devoted to advancing social justice, it promotes a Decent Work Agenda based on four strategic pillars: rights at work, decent employment opportunities, social protection and social dialogue.

It is the only public international organisation which is tripartite, where workers and employers enjoy equal rights with governments in representation and decision-making. Together they set labour standards, develop policies and devise programmes upholding decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity for all.

Created in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, the ILO became the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946. It received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969 and today is recognized as the world’s authority on the world of work, offering over 100 years of knowledge, experience and achievements.
The International Labour Organization (ILO) works to promote decent and productive employment opportunities for women and men in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been an active member State of the ILO since 22 June 1972 and has ratified 35 ILO Conventions including seven fundamental conventions.

The ILO opened its office in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 25 June 1973, and initially started working on expanding income-earning opportunities through labour-based infrastructure development and maintenance.

More recent technical cooperation activities have focused on enhancing working conditions and labour rights with considerable emphasis being placed on the ready-made garment sector. Major initiatives are also taking place in the areas of skills development and migration.

**PRIORITY AREAS**

**Working conditions:** the ILO is working to improve industrial safety, build the capacity of national regulatory bodies, and enhance Occupational Safety and Health in Bangladesh.

**Rights at work:** The ILO works with both workers and employers organisations to promote better compliance and capacity building relating to international labour standards, particularly freedom of association and collective bargaining. Focus is placed on strengthening social dialogue amongst the government, workers and employers to prevent and resolve industrial disputes.

**Skills and employment:** The ILO works to improve the national enabling environment for industry skills development and the increased employability of young and adult women and men, including those with disabilities.

**Social protection:** the ILO strives to ensure protection and decent employment conditions for Bangladeshi migrant workers. Effort is made to eliminate child labour, promote the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples and establish basic social protection benefits.

As part of the UN system in Bangladesh, the ILO supports the Government of Bangladesh in implementing its Five Year Plan and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

**Partnerships:** the ILO Country Office for Bangladesh encourages tripartism by promoting social dialogue among the government, employers and workers organizations.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) is ILO’s counterpart on labour issues at the country level. In addition, the ILO works closely with the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment with regards to migration and social protection issues as well as the Ministry of Education on skills development.

ILO works with employers through their focal representative body, the Bangladesh Employers’ Federation (BEF) and the workers through the National Coordination Committee for Workers’ Education (NCCWE) and IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC).

Development partners of the ILO in Bangladesh include Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and USA.

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Decent work: a key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

“Decent work is not just a goal – it is a driver of sustainable development”

Guy Ryder, ILO Director General

By embracing the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social and environmental, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a once-in-a-generation chance to make a change and improve the lives of billions, leaving no one behind.

At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while working to preserve our planet.

The importance of decent work in achieving sustainable development is highlighted by Goal 8 which aims to “promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

Putting decent work at the heart of economic policy-making and development plans will not only generate jobs but also lead to more robust, inclusive and poverty-reducing growth. It is a virtuous circle that is as good for the economy as it is for people, and one that drives sustainable development.