Japan is a founding member State of the ILO, and a valued partner in promoting the Decent Work Agenda. Japan has ratified 49 Conventions, including six Fundamental, three Governance and 40 Technical Conventions.

Japan’s contribution to the ILO

A key partner in the promotion of social justice and decent work, Japan supports the ILO’s mandate by contributing to both its core budget and its development cooperation programmes.

The ILO works closely with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), its governmental constituent. This collaboration aims primarily to support fair globalization, contributing to poverty reduction, advancing occupational safety and health, promoting international labour standards and social dialogue.

MHLW provides strategic funding to implement development, research and crisis-response programmes, chiefly through a multi-bilateral programme and a lightly-earmarked funding facility to build Social Safety Nets in Asia and the Pacific. The Ministry further supports the work of the ILO’s International Training Centre in Turin to strengthen the capacity of actors in the world of work.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) provides further support in the area of prevention and response to crisis and fragility, both directly and through the UN Trust Fund for Human Security. This cooperation includes livelihood-oriented emergency response to both humanitarian and environmental crises. The ILO also collaborates with the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for technical interventions at the local level.

The collaboration extends to the Japanese private sector, such as Fast Retailing, the holding company of the Japanese apparel retailer UNIQLO, which is supporting a global programme to promote employment and social protection in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the ILO benefits from Japanese expertise through the country’s participation in the Junior Professional Officer programme as well as the secondment of Japanese officials and specialists from the Japanese Consumers’ Cooperative Union. The latter also supports, with the Japanese Co-operative Alliance, an annual Study Tour to Japan for African cooperative leaders, which celebrated its 10th edition in 2019.

Japan’s international assistance priorities

Japan contributes proactively to the peace, stability and prosperity of the international community.

The priority areas for Japanese international assistance are:

- Poverty reduction and quality growth: education, health and population, water and sanitation, agriculture and rural development, infrastructures and ICT.
- Peace building and humanitarian assistance
- Resilient international community: environment, energy, climate change and disaster risk reduction
- Gender equality and human security.

In 2018, Japan provided US$ 14.2 billion in Official Development Assistance, which represents 0.28% of its gross national income. (source: OECD Development cooperation report 2019)
Despite efforts by the international community and businesses to promote decent work for all, most global supply chain initiatives have been limited mostly to the formal sector, which accounts for less than 40 per cent of global jobs. As a result, they often failed to reach the most disadvantaged groups. The ILO and Japan are seeking to overcome this obstacle by promoting ethical and sustainable global supply chains, focusing on the most vulnerable people working in the informal economy, such as women and migrants, in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

To date, the project has trained more than 4,100 people from the government, trade unions, membership-based organizations and sectoral employers organizations on the rights and entitlements of informal and home-based workers, including on wages, health and safety. More than 2,080 workers have organized and unionized in India and Nepal – of which more than 1,320 women and 750 men. Moreover, employers’ organizations supported the registration of 40 women-led micro enterprises.

The future of work in ICT: Tackling the global challenge of skills shortages

The ILO and the MHLW are supporting a global research project on anticipated needs for skilled workers in the digital economy. The ICT sector, like many others, is undergoing a deep transformation that calls for a highly-skilled, digitally oriented workforce. However, there is an acute, global shortage of ICT specialists. Findings of the research, which was undertaken in seven countries, are being compiled in a series of three research reports, with the first published in June 2019. The final report will be presented in late 2020 at a global research seminar in Tokyo.
Recognizing the importance of social safety nets in Asia and the Pacific in responding to financial crises, unemployment and natural disasters, the MHLW established the Fund for Building Social Safety Nets in Asia and the Pacific (SSN Fund) in 2011 in partnership with the ILO.

A flexible and rapid funding mechanism, the SSN Fund has supported nearly 60 projects to develop social protection schemes, improve occupational safety and health, promote employment through skills training and entrepreneurship, and eradicate child labour as well as enhance resilience to natural hazards by supporting livelihoods recovery and reconstruction projects in affected areas.

Nurturing Livelihoods and Business Awareness through Activity-Based Learning

For several years, the SSN fund has supported the ILO to develop a range of low cost, activity-based learning tools for enhancing business and entrepreneurship skills, which are now used globally. The initial work on a family of training packages for marginalized groups and youth, under the banner “Community-Based Enterprise Development” (C-BED), has been used to enhance the knowledge of more than 20,000 people about entrepreneurship, financial literacy and small business management. In 2019, Entrepreneurship Day events in Cambodia and Lao PDR reached more than 5,000 youth and included learning activities in all of Cambodia’s 25 provinces. With SSN funding, the activity-based learning approach expanded to include support for cooperatives, under the Our.Coop training method. Beyond Cambodia, Our. Coop tools are now used in more than 20 countries and have been translated into multiple languages. SSN Fund initiatives are also expanding to provide soft skills training for youth, in partnership with the labour, education and tourism ministries of several countries.

Supporting post-disaster recovery

The ILO and Japan also bring their support in response to natural disasters in most vulnerable areas. Most recently, joint livelihood recovery and reconstruction programmes were established in the Pacific Island countries, Indonesia, India, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka.

Every year around 2.8 million workers die from work-related injuries or illnesses. This dramatic loss of life is also estimated to represent almost four per cent of global annual GDP, or US$ 3 trillion per year. Japan is a major partner in the ILO’s efforts to reverse this trend, especially in Asia and the Pacific.

In Cambodia, for instance, a Japan-funded project is helping revise national OSH legislation, policies and practices in the construction industry – a sector prone to hazards and risks, including asbestos and chemicals exposure. Cambodian labour inspectors also benefit from ILO awareness-raising campaigns and trainings as part of the initiative.

In Myanmar, Japan and the ILO are supporting the implementation of the new OSH Law adopted by Parliament in March 2019. In cooperation with the government, employers and workers, the project is working to create a culture of prevention on safety and health as well as to enhance access to OSH services across the country.
Training programmes at the International Training Centre of the ILO

Within the scope of the cooperation framework between the ILO and the MHLW, the Government of Japan provides financial and technical support to the training activities of the ILO’s International Training Centre in Turin. The appointment of Japanese experts has strengthened the Centre’s courses on employment and training policies and practices, occupational safety and health and labour inspections, while allowing the Government of Japan to benefit from international exposure and peer-to-peer exchanges.

Youth employment opportunities for refugees and the host community in Mauritania

The Mbera Refugee Camp, located in the arid southeast department of Bassikounou, is home to around 56,000 Malian refugees. Due to limited employment opportunities, lack of vocational skills and limited sources of revenue, refugees face enormous difficulties in earning an adequate livelihood. Similarly, Mauritanian host communities face high unemployment and underemployment. Creating jobs is thus an indispensable part of the response to the rapid increase in refugee arrivals as well as essential for mitigating socioeconomic instability and perceived and inequality between refugees and host communities.

With the support of US$ 1 million from Japan, the ILO is working to promote decent work and local economic development through employment-intensive construction in Mauritania. Since the start of the project in 2019, close to a hundred young people have been trained on-site in construction techniques, contributing to the construction of an elementary school in the refugee camp. Furthermore, a hundred beneficiaries in Nouakchott and the coastal Trarza region are being trained by the Japanese NGO Community Road Empowerment (CORE) to use Do-nou technology, an eco-construction methodology used for employment intensive road rehabilitation works and sustainable local socioeconomic development. Trainers trained will be able to disseminate the technology in the refugee camp. Local enterprises and workers are also being supported to improve their occupational safety and health practices as well as ensure decent work conditions.

Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games

In 2018, the ILO and the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Tokyo 2020) signed a partnership agreement to promote sustainability and advance socially responsible labour practices among the Games’ delivery partners. Annual Tokyo 2020–ILO Sustainability Fora, organised since 2017 in Tokyo with the active participation of ILO constituents, have raised awareness amongst the Games’ delivery partners on the labour dimension of Corporate Social Responsibility. This has led to the development of practical tools such as the Handbook on Sustainable Sourcing for Tokyo 2020 and the collection and dissemination of good practices to promote socially responsible labour practices. This unique collaboration constitutes the ILO’s first official partnership with an Olympic and Paralympic Organizing Committee and Tokyo 2020’s first partnership with a UN organization.

This alliance is aligned with similar Japan-ILO initiatives, including the project "More and better jobs through socially responsible practices in Pakistan", which focuses on promoting decent work in the sporting goods manufacturing sector in Sialkot, Pakistan – a major supplier to not only the Olympics but also the football World Cup.

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