



► ILO Brief

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Advancing Decent Work in Supply chains Decent Work Challenges and Opportunities in the Textiles and Clothing Sector

► 1. Introduction

The textiles and clothing industries contribute significantly to economic and employment growth. Worldwide, textiles and clothing represented 6 per cent of all the manufactured goods that were exported in 2022.¹

The garment industry alone offers employment to more than 90 million people globally.² It is a vital source of livelihood, particularly for women who constitute most of its workforce. Seventy-five per cent of all garment workers are in Asia.

Technological advancements and sustainability imperatives are profoundly changing the textiles and clothing sector. Innovations in materials science and digital manufacturing are revolutionizing production processes. Changing consumer preferences and mounting pressure to reduce the large environmental footprint of the sector have propelled a shift towards eco-friendly and circular economy practices. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these drivers of change, intensifying pressures on firms that were already grappling with trade turbulence and volatile operating environments.

In order to navigate these transitions effectively and leave no one behind, governments, employers and workers must come together to solve challenges that are too great to solve each on their own and maximize the opportunities offered by these transformations. The present brief offers an overview of key decent work deficits, opportunities, and practices within the sector that can inform sectoral social dialogue and thus be used to advance social justice and a just transition for all.

¹ World Trade Organization (WTO), *World Trade Statistical Review*, 2023.

² ILO, "[How to Achieve Gender Equality in Global Garment Supply Chains](#)", ILO InfoStories, accessed 03 May 2024

► 2. Global trends in the industry

The textiles and clothing sector is undergoing significant changes driven by megatrends such as demographic shifts, climate change, a new era of globalization, and technological advances.³

Demographic changes, such as the rising global middle class and changes in consumer preferences, drive demand for textiles and clothing. The Organisation for Co-operation and Development (OECD) projects that population and economic growth will lead to a growing global middle class, which could reach 4.9 billion by 2030.⁴ As hundreds of millions of new consumers join the global middle class each year, global aggregate demand for textiles and clothing is likely to increase significantly.

At the same time, a new era of globalization and trade dynamics are reshaping supply chains and creating new opportunities and challenges for the industry. The offshoring and outsourcing model that emerged with trade liberalization and expanded with the end of the textile quota system in 2005, resulted in rapid growth of the industry in Asia and other parts of the developing world. At the same time, Europe and North America experienced significant employment losses. This shift created opportunities both for employers and workers by enabling access to employment and income generation. Yet concerns about working conditions in textiles and clothing supply chains around the world have persisted in particular in countries with weak governance systems.⁵ This pattern has recently changed with the rise of new regional supply chains and persistent attempts of policymakers in key markets to bring production closer or home.

Technological advancements, including automation, robotics, digitalization and new materials, are transforming the industry, both in terms of new products as well as innovative production processes. Digitalization is shaping how products are designed, how supply chains are managed, how and where production takes place, how logistics systems are automated and run, and how products are marketed, sold and delivered to the consumer. As the result of the COVID-19 crisis, the sector has seen a dramatic change downstream in the supply chain with an increase of e-commerce and closure of shops. Digitalization is also increasingly used to achieve greater transparency and traceability in supply chains.

Although automation and technological advancements have the potential to reshape the industry, their impacts on gender equality remain uncertain. Studies suggest that technological upgrading may lead to the defeminization of employment, disproportionately affecting women's jobs.⁶ Gendered norms and institutional factors play a crucial role in perpetuating inequalities, with men often favoured for higher-paying positions and women relegated to labour-intensive, low-skilled, low-wage roles.

Finally, the changing climate is not only affecting the sector directly, it has also prompted the adoption of policies and practices to mitigate the impact of the textiles and clothing industries on the environment.⁷ The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)⁸ indicates that the textiles sector currently is responsible for up to 8 per cent of world's greenhouse gases emissions, consumes 215 trillion litres of water every year,⁹ and accounts for 9 per cent of annual

³ ILO, [“The Future of Work in Textiles, clothing, leather and footwear”](#), Working Paper No. 326, 2019.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), [“The Future of Global Value Chains: Business as Usual or “A New Normal”?”](#), Policy Paper No. 41, 2017.

⁵ ILO, [Report on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains](#), ILC.105/IV, 2016.

⁶ ILO and EU, [“The State of the Apparel and Footwear Industry: Employment, Automation and their Gender Dimensions”](#), Background Papers No. 3, 2022.

⁷ ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook Report, Chapter 5: Skills for the Green Transition, 2018.

⁸ UNEP, [Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain - A Global Roadmap](#), 2023.

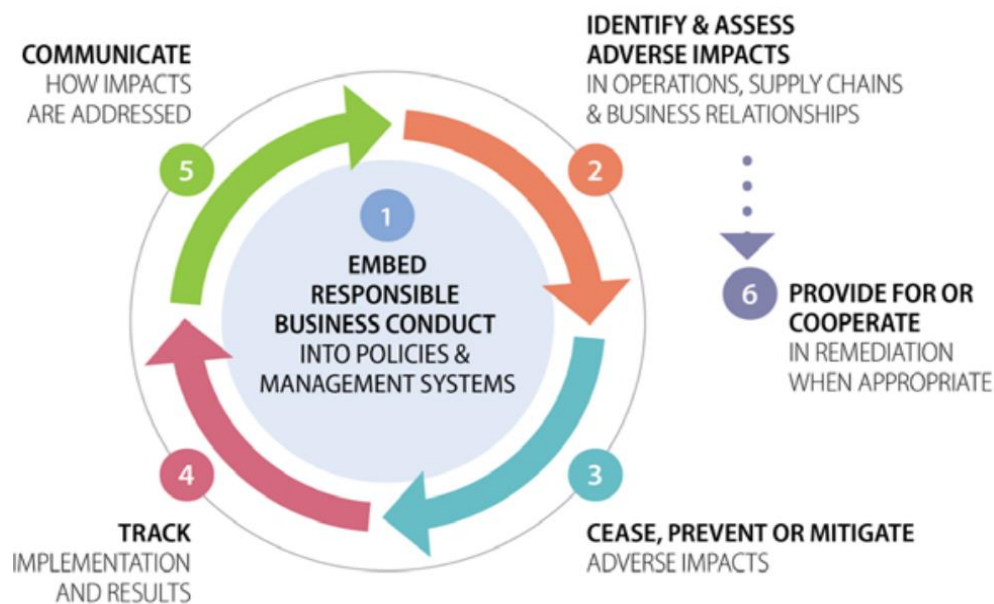
⁹ Quantis, [“Measuring Fashion: Environmental Impact of the Global Apparel and Footwear Industries”](#), 2018.

microplastic losses to oceans.¹⁰ Faced with a combination of excessive heat, increased exposure to extreme weather events, flooding and other direct effects of climate change,¹¹ more and more enterprises are accelerating the adoption of cleaner, more efficient and less wasteful production practices. This is in turn increasing demand for new skills and a just transition, as discussed below.

In addition to the above-mentioned megatrends and drivers of change, the textiles and clothing industry is affected by new policy developments, including the incorporation of labour provisions in trade agreements and the developments in human rights due diligence requirements. These frameworks that promote responsible business conduct often refer to the international instruments such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹², the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct¹³, the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration)¹⁴.

Although different in terms of scope and implementation mechanisms, legislation and regulations recently adopted in key markets share the common goal of ensuring that governments, enterprises, trade unions and other key stakeholders take action to promote fundamental principles and rights at work, other human and labour rights and environmental agreements throughout the supply chain.

Figure 1. Due diligence process and supporting measures



Source: [OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct](#), 2018

¹⁰ UNEP, “[Mapping of Global Plastics Value Chain and Plastics Losses to the Environment: with a Particular Focus on Marine Environment](#)”, 2018.

¹¹ ILO, “[The future of work in textiles, clothing, leather and footwear](#)”, Working Papers No. 326, 2019.

¹² The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights was [adopted](#) in 2011.

¹³ The [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct](#) were adopted in 1976 and subsequently revised in 2011 and 2023.

¹⁴ The Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) is the only ILO instrument that provides direct guidance to enterprises (multinational and national) on social policy and inclusive, responsible and sustainable workplace practices. It was adopted more than 40 years ago and amended several times (in 2000, 2006, 2017), most recently in 2022. Its principles are addressed to multinational and national enterprises, governments of home and host countries, and employers’ and workers’ organizations providing guidance in such areas as employment, training, conditions of work and life, industrial relations as well as general policies. The guidance is founded substantially on principles contained in international labour standards.

The European Union is at the forefront of these efforts with the newly adopted Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and other related regulations, which require European companies to identify, prevent, and mitigate human rights and environmental abuses linked to their operations, including those occurring abroad. Countries such as Germany and France have already implemented national laws, i.e., Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act and France's Duty of Vigilance Law, which establish due diligence responsibilities for enterprises regarding labour rights and environment protection. Outside of Europe, countries including Canada, Japan, and Australia are adopting or enhancing similar frameworks, reflecting a global shift towards embedding respect for human rights into corporate governance.

While these initiatives have the potential to advance decent work, there may be unintended consequences that it would be important for governments, employers' and workers' organizations to address through social dialogue. This includes the complexity and cost of compliance for small and medium-sized enterprises in key markets and supply chains as well as other unintended consequences. Ensuring that regulatory frameworks are developed and implemented in consultation with all affected stakeholders and reflect their views is essential to mitigating negative impacts and promoting sustainable growth within the textiles and clothing sector.

► 3. Decent work challenges and opportunities in the textiles and clothing sector

The textiles and clothing sector provides employment opportunities and foster enterprise growth, making it a significant contributor to socioeconomic development. The sector supports the livelihoods of millions worldwide and drives economic growth in many countries. At the same time, workers can encounter long hours of work, exposure to safety and health risks, and limited social protection, especially in regions and countries where labour laws and regulation are either underdeveloped or inadequately enforced. There are also reported cases of lack of respect for freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining in the sector. Addressing these questions requires strengthening institutional capacities, respecting fundamental principles and rights at work, promoting an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and fostering social dialogue among governments, employers and workers organisations to improve decent working conditions in the industry.¹⁵

The ILO [Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation](#) highlights the necessity of fair globalisation and emphasises the need for social protection, labour rights, productive employment opportunities and social dialogue. This Declaration provides a foundation for enhancing decent work in the textiles and clothing sector as an effective response to the challenges in the sector.¹⁶

An essential aspect of the ILO's work is the adoption and implementation of international labour standards that assist governments in establishing national legislation to regulate labour rights and provide employers' and workers' representatives with a solid legal framework. The ILO's unique tripartite structure ensures that these standards are backed by governments, employers and workers alike. International labour standards therefore lay down the basic minimum social standards agreed upon by all the players in the global economy. The implementation of international labour standards by ILO Member States is monitored by a Supervisory mechanism to ensure compliance with ratified Conventions. The ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Standards and Recommendations (CEACR) is the independent body charged with examining the application of ILO Conventions, Protocols and Recommendations by ILO Member States. In CEACR's 2024 report there were more than 15 cases concerning the textiles and clothing sector in 15

¹⁵ ILO, [The Future of Work in Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear](#)", Working Paper No. 326, 2019.

¹⁶ The Social Justice Declaration calls for the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda comprising four inseparable and interrelated strategic objectives: (i) promoting employment by creating a sustainable institutional and economic environment; (ii) developing and enhancing measures of social protection – social security and labour protection; (iii) promoting social dialogue and tripartism; (iv) respecting, promoting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work.

different countries around the world.¹⁷ CEACR's report is reviewed annually by the Commission of Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference, a standing tripartite body which is responsible for determining the extent to which international labour standards are given effect.

Achieving the goal of decent work in the globalized economy requires action at the international level. The world community is responding to this challenge in part by developing international legal instruments on trade, finance, the environment, human rights and labour. The ILO contributes to this legal framework by elaborating and promoting international labour standards aimed at making sure that economic growth and development go hand-in-hand with the creation of decent work. An international legal framework on social standards ensures a level playing field in the global economy.

To assist its Members to promote, respect and realize decent work and comply with their obligations in the textiles sector, the ILO deploys several means of action, including building consensus, enhancing knowledge, implementing development cooperation and training programmes, and fostering strategic partnerships.

Box 1: The ILO/IFC Better Work Programme: promoting decent work in textiles sector

- Better Work is an ILO flagship development cooperation programme jointly implemented with the International Finance Corporation (IFC). It brings together governments, businesses, factory owners, workers, brands and retailers to improve working conditions in textiles and apparel.

The programme is currently being implemented in 13 countries benefiting more than three million workers in 2,186 factories. It encompasses a series of actions aiming at:

- Improving working conditions: Better Work helps factories comply with national legislation in line with international labour standards, by addressing issues like freedom of association, wages, working hours, safety, and gender equality.
- Strengthening labour compliance: The program conducts factory assessments to identify non-compliance with national laws and provisions of ILO international labour standards, providing guidance for improvement.
- Promoting worker-management dialogue: Through training and dialogue initiatives, Better Work improves communication between workers and management, reducing workplace conflicts.
- Supporting sustainable supply chains: Better Work helps businesses adopt ethical labour practices, improving productivity and reducing worker turnover, which boosts long-term business success.
- Enhancing Transparency: By publishing reports on factory conditions, Better Work ensures accountability and helps brands align with labour standards.
- Empowering women: The programme addresses gender issues, including sexual harassment and maternity rights, while promoting leadership opportunities for women in the garment sector.

¹⁷ ILO, [Application of International Labour Standards 2024](#), ILC.112/Report III(A), 2024.

3.1. Fundamental principles and rights at work

Fundamental principles and rights at work are integral to ensuring decent work in textiles and clothing sector. The [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) (FPRW), adopted in 1998 and amended in 2022, signifies the collective commitment of governments, employers' organizations, and workers' organizations to uphold essential human values that are crucial for workers' social and economic well-being.

In accordance with the Declaration, all ILO Members are obliged to respect, promote and realize the principles concerning the following fundamental Conventions, irrespective if they have ratified or not such Conventions:

- **Freedom of association and collective bargaining**
 - [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 \(No. 87\)](#)
 - [Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 \(No. 98\)](#)
- **Forced labour**
 - [Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\) and its Protocol of 2014, 1930](#)
 - [Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 \(No. 105\)](#)
- **Child labour**
 - [Minimum Age Convention, 1973 \(No.138\)](#)
 - [Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 \(No.182\)](#)
- **Non-discrimination and equality**
 - [Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No. 100\)](#)
 - [Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#)
- **A safe and healthy working environment**
 - [Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 \(No. 155\)](#)
 - [Promotional Framework for Occupational Health Convention, 2006 \(No. 187\)](#)

Implementing fundamental principles and rights at work entails collaboration between several partners. Improving labour market governance systems and strengthening the capacity of governments, employers and workers to realize these principles are the foremost requirement to promote social justice and advance decent work.

Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining

Freedom of association plays a critical role in enabling workers and employers in industries to effectively organize and establish fruitful work relations. Governments are tasked with establishing a stable political and civil climate, as well as legal frameworks that support the independent operation of employers' and workers' organizations, free from the fear of reprisal.

Collective bargaining is a process of voluntary negotiation between one or more employers (or their organizations) and one or more workers' organizations (that is, trade unions).¹⁸ Collective bargaining is a key mechanism for forging sound industrial relations for establishing fair wages and working conditions and averting costly labour disputes.

The respect to freedom of association, coupled with effective collective bargaining practices, ensures that both employers and workers have a voice in negotiations, leading to fair and equitable outcomes.

While employers and workers in the textiles and clothing sector have engaged in collective bargaining to negotiate working conditions, wages, social protection and other benefits, collective bargaining agreements and the respect to the right to join trade unions vary across countries and regions. For instance, European countries such as Germany have a

¹⁸ Social Dialogue Report. Collective bargaining for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery, 2022.

well-established machinery which enables high coverage of collective bargaining, and Brazil has vibrant collective bargaining mechanisms due to active unions and employers engagement and a legal inductive legal framework.

Nonetheless, the picture is mixed in other regions. Grievances over wages and working hours and conditions have in many countries resulted in lengthy and costly strikes or civil unrest in the sector due to the lack of mature industrial relations and solid mechanism for bargaining collectively.¹⁹

This variation can be attributed to different factors, including the structure and capacity of trade unions and employers' organizations, the legal scope of collective bargaining rights (such as whether public servants are included), the institutional framework for bargaining (whether it occurs at a multi-employer or single-employer level), and how collective agreements are implemented.²⁰

Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour

Forced labour, as set out in the [ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 \(No. 29\)](#), refers to *"all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily."*

There are 27.6 million people in situations of forced labour around the globe, according to the ILO. This absolute number translates to 3.5 people in forced labour for every thousand people in the world. Women and girls make up 11.8 million of the totals in forced labour. More than 3.3 million of all those in forced labour are children.²¹

According to the 2022 ILO Global estimates of modern slavery, the manufacturing sector - which include the textile and clothing industry - accounts for nearly one-fifth of all forced labour exploitation of adults, about 3 million people. Forced labour remains a critical issue in the textiles supply chain, with workers, often in low-wage countries, in debt bondage, withheld wages, and excessive overtime under threat or coercion ending up in situation of forced labour. Forced labour is more likely to be found in the lower tiers of the textile, and garment supply chains, in particular in the production of raw materials and in the informal economy. Its presence is closely tied to systemic challenges that undermine the sustainability of these supply chains and violate fundamental labour rights. Because forced labour is deeply ingrained and often concealed within the supply chain, it remains hidden from businesses, making it difficult for them to implement effective, sustainable solutions.²²

Forced labour in the textile and garment manufacturing sector includes significant instances of debt bondage, which affects about 14 per cent of all forced labour cases in manufacturing. Debt bondage, where individuals are forced to work to pay off inflated or manipulated debts, is particularly affecting vulnerable groups in the apparel sector.²³ Forced labour is also related to forced overtime under threat of penalty.²⁴

Some of the factors contributing to the high susceptibility of the textile and garment sector to poor working conditions and abusive practices include the labour-intensive nature of the industry, the systematic pricing pressure by buyers, and the lack of effective implementation of national labour legislation and social policies in garment-exporting countries.²⁵

Several countries have adopted different measures and initiatives to combat forced and bonded labour in the sector (see above). New regulatory frameworks, for instance, have been adopted by several countries and regions (Canada, the

¹⁹ ILO, *"Wages and Working Hours in the Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Industries"*, GDFTCLI/2014, 2014.

²⁰ Social Dialogue Report. Collective bargaining for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery, 2022.

²¹ Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, 2022, accessed 6 November 2024

²² ILO, EU and FAO, *"Eliminating Child Labour and Forced Labour in the Cotton, Textile and Garment Value Chains: An Integrated Approach"*, 2018.

²³ Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, 2022, accessed 6 November 2024

²⁴ The ILO/IFC Better Work programme found [non-compliance related to forced labour in eight](#) factories across four countries.

²⁵ ILO. Preventing forced labour in the textile and garment supply chains in Viet Nam Guide for employers, 2016

European Union, United States) to ban import of products made with forced labour from entering their markets, with several reported cases of imported clothing products upheld in ports.²⁶

Meanwhile, the ILO continues to support its constituents to advance policies and action to address all forms forced or compulsory labour. This involves enhancing international cooperation and information sharing on best practices, including through the [ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour](#).²⁷

Effective abolition of child labour

Child labour is work that harms children's well-being and hinders his or her education, development and future livelihood. Children may be too young to perform and/or work, and by nature or its circumstances may harm children's health, safety or morals. The [ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 \(No. 138\)](#)²⁸ and the universally ratified [ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 \(No. 182\)](#)²⁹ set legal boundaries for child labour and provide grounds for national and international actions to abolish it.

At the start of 2020, 160 million children – 63 million girls and 97 million boys – were in child labour, or 1 in 10 children worldwide. Seventy-nine million children – nearly half of all those in child labour – were in hazardous work directly endangering their health, safety and moral development.³⁰ Agriculture accounts for two-third of child labour worldwide, while services and industry accounts for twenty and 10 per cent.

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Child labour is found mostly in the lower tiers of the textile supply chain, particularly in cotton production systems in Africa and Asia, which are labour-intensive and often dominated by smallholder farms or sharecropping systems.³¹ Nonetheless, there were still cases of child labour found in garment factories.³²

The ILO has been implementing a series of programmes to combat child labour in cotton in Africa, including the project “Accelerating action for the elimination of child labour in supply chains in Africa (ACCEL Africa)” and the ILO/Brazil South-South Cooperation Programme to promote decent work in cotton production. In Uzbekistan, the ILO has provided support for reducing child and forced labour in cotton harvest, through a systematic monitoring process and assistance

²⁶ US Department of Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs. [List of Goods produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour](#). Accessed 07 Marc 2023.

²⁷ ILO Global Business Network on Forced Labour members are businesses of all sizes and sectors, employer and business membership organisations, industry trade groups and sectoral associations

²⁸ The minimum of age for specified in C138 “shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than 15 years. The Convention acknowledges that some member States can specify the minimum wage of 14 years in cases which the economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed, provided proper justification is submitted to the International Labour Conference.

²⁹ C187 forbids children below 18 to work in worst forms of child labour, comprising:” a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.”

³⁰ ILO and UNICEF, “[Child Labour: Global estimates 2020, Trends and the Road forward](#)”, 2021.

³¹ ILO, EU and FAO, “[Eliminating Child Labour and Forced Labour in the Cotton, Textile and Garment Value Chains: An Integrated Approach](#)”, 2018.

³² The ILO/IFC Better Work programme found [non-compliance related to underage workers in seven factories across five countries](#).

to tripartite constituents. As a result, an estimated two million children have been taken out of child labour and half a million adults out of forced labour since the reform process of the Uzbekistan's cotton sector began in 2015.³³

[Alliance 8.7](#) plays an important role in facilitating cooperation on child labour among governmental and non-governmental actors. A global partnership launched in 2016, Alliance 8.7 groups governments, multilateral organizations, workers' organizations, employers' organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and think tanks to find ways of accelerating action. The Alliance focuses on three strategies: conducting research and sharing knowledge, driving innovation, and increasing and leveraging resources.

Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation

Hundreds of millions of people suffer from discrimination in the world of work. This not only violates human rights but has wider social and economic consequences. Discrimination stifles opportunities, wasting the human talent needed for economic progress, and may accentuate social tensions and inequalities. Combating discrimination is an essential part of promoting decent work, and success on this front will have impact beyond the workplace.

Promoting gender equality and non-discrimination in the textiles and clothing sector is vital for inclusive growth and tackling persistent inequalities. Despite historically offering significant opportunities for women's employment, the sector still grapples with challenges such as poor working conditions, labour rights violations, and gender-based discrimination. In particular, women workers in the sector face a lack of representation in decision-making roles, limited pay compared to men conducting the same work, and barriers to employment due to unpaid care duties. They are also more exposed to discrimination, violence, and harassment, with issues exacerbated by economic insecurity, particularly during the pandemic.³⁴

In addition to promoting the fundamental Conventions, the ILO applies a multifaceted approach to advancing gender equality in the textiles sector. This includes, but is not limited to:

- adopting and enforcing legal frameworks and national policies concerning equality of opportunity and treatment;
- strengthening human rights institutions;
- fostering social dialogue and collaboration between workers and employers organizations on concrete measures to effectively combat discrimination and promote equality for women at work.

³³ ILO. [Uzbek cotton is free from systemic child labour and forced labour](#)

³⁴ Better Work: [How to achieve gender equality in global garment supply chains - InfoStories](#)

Box 2: Non-discrimination and gender equality in the textile sector ³⁵

Despite different cultural and economic contexts, garment workers face similar gender-related challenges globally. From 2010 to 2016, a panel of Better Work survey data explored the impact on various dimensions of labour conditions in Haiti, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Jordan, including harassment and abuse, health and wellbeing.

For women, Better Work has shown success in improving wages and reducing working hours with evidence from countries including Indonesia, Vietnam, Jordan, and Haiti. However, structural issues such as maternity pay disparities, especially for women with children, and unequal incentive distribution persist in places like Haiti and Vietnam.

Women with lower education levels, particularly in Jordan, Nicaragua, and Haiti, are less likely to voice concerns. Gender disparities in promotions remain a persistent challenge, pointing to the need for further efforts to develop women's leadership and ensure their empowerment.

Moreover, the ILO adopted the [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#) in 2019. This is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment. Ratified by 49 countries to date, the Convention requires member States to adopt an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach to prevent and address such behaviours in the world of work and envisages action on prevention, protection, enforcement, remedies, guidance, training and awareness raising.³⁶ The Convention and its accompanying Recommendation No.206 are important instruments to address gender-based violence in the sector.

Several organizations have taken the initiative of promoting Convention in the textiles sector. For instance, IndustriALL Global Union is using these ILO instruments to build the capacity of textiles and clothing workers to combat violence and harassment in the industries.³⁷ Businesses, including multinational enterprises, have also adopted codes of conduct and other voluntary initiatives that are based on the principles of these instruments to curb violence and harassment in the sector.

A safe and healthy working environment

The textiles and clothing sector involves various processes that pose health and safety risks, such as exposure to hazardous chemicals, biological and physical hazards (e.g. excessive noise, extreme heat), ergonomic hazards (e.g. heavy lifting, repetitive tasks, prolonged working hours), etc. The sector has witnessed a series of severe accidents and fires that have cost the lives of thousands of workers. Following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, governments, companies, employers' organizations, trade unions and civil society organizations have renewed and enhanced their efforts to improve safe and health in the sector, through the adoption of specific OSH measures and training for labour inspectors, factory managers and workers' representatives. Moreover, regular audits and performance monitoring contributes to a continuous improvement to ensure safe and healthy workplaces.

In June 2022, the International Labour Conference adopted a [Resolution](#) that included a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work, amended the [1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#) accordingly, and recognised [Convention 155](#) and [Convention 187](#) as fundamental ILO conventions.³⁸ The same year, the ILO published its new [Code of Practice on Safety and Health in the Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear industries](#), which provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing

³⁵ Better Work [Discussion Paper 30: An Impact Evaluation of Better Work from a Gender Perspective - Better Work](#)

³⁶ ILO: [Violence and harassment: a guide on Convention N° 190 and Recommendation N° 206](#).

³⁷ IndustriALL: [Workers confront sexual exploitation at Ugandan cardboard manufacturing factory](#)

³⁸ ILO. [A safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental principle and right at work](#)

occupational safety and health in the sector. Underpinned by international labour standards, key recommendations include establishing robust OSH management systems, involving workers in safety processes, and conducting thorough risk assessments to implement preventive measures. It emphasizes the importance of worker training, ergonomic design, chemical safety, and machinery maintenance. The Code also advocates for emergency preparedness, health surveillance, and special protections for vulnerable workers, including gender-sensitive measures and support for young and aging workers.

Adopting and enforcing national legislation and establishing bipartite or tripartite OSH committees are essential to ensure a safe and healthy working environment in the sector.

3.2. Employment creation and enterprise development

The textile and clothing sector has long been a significant source of employment, both in developed and developing economies, where it often serves as a foundation for industrialization and economic growth. The sector employs millions of workers worldwide, offering job opportunities in a wide range of occupations along the supply chain.

Through promoting sustainable enterprises and building skills and technical competencies, the ILO supports pathways to formal and decent employment within the sector to ensure the growth of the textile and clothing sector contributes to improved working conditions, social protection, and opportunities for all workers.

Generating employment and income opportunities to all

The textile and clothing sector remains crucial in creating employment opportunities, especially for women and young workers. The sector serves as an engine for industrialization and economic development in both developed and developing countries. With millions of workers employed along its supply chain, the sector provides livelihoods, especially for workers in low- and middle-income countries. Fostering a sustainable and inclusive environment that promotes decent work, and equitable economic progress is critical.

There has been a resurgence of sectoral or industrial policies in recent years, including in the textiles and clothing sector. Industrial policies promote the creation of quality jobs and inclusive growth, fostering equitable distribution of economic development benefits across society. Several large textiles and clothing producing countries have recently adopted new textiles strategies and policies. For instance, the European Union has adopted, in March 2022, the Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles, which focuses on the entire lifecycle of textile products and established specific actions to promote a change on production and consumption behaviours.³⁹ Moreover, the ILO has conducted a comparative analysis of such policies adopted by Cambodia, Jordan and Viet Nam, which can be used by other countries to inform sustainable industrial policies through social dialogue.⁴⁰

EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles aims at creating a greener, more competitive textiles sector. Textiles consumption accounts for:

- 5 million tonnes of discharged clothing every year
- 20-35 jobs created for each 1,000 tonnes
- 1% of recycled materials

³⁹ European Union. [EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles](#), March 2022.

⁴⁰ ILO: Sustainable industrial policies and strategies in the textiles and clothing sector: lessons learned from Cambodia, Jordan and Viet Nam, forthcoming.

Promoting sustainable enterprises

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) are central to the promotion of decent work, economic growth and social justice. Despite their significance, MSMEs face the challenge of low productivity and competitiveness and high vulnerability to economic, political and environmental shocks. Women, young workers and entrepreneurs operating in the informal economy are particularly vulnerable and face additional constraints.⁴¹

To overcome these barriers and improve working conditions in MSMEs, collaboration between governments, employers' and workers' organizations is essential to fostering an environment that supports sustainable enterprises. This includes advancing entrepreneurship, improving market access, enhancing productivity, and promoting formalization and decent work. These efforts help unlock the full potential of MSMEs as drivers of human-centred, green, and resilient growth.

Box 3: The ILO SCORE Programme for SMEs in the textile sector in Tunisia

The [ILO SCORE \(Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises\) Programme](#) improves productivity and working conditions in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), through practical training and on-site consulting. SCORE introduces international best practices across manufacturing and service sectors and equips MSMEs to access global supply chains. It emphasizes fostering cooperative workplace relationships, resulting in shared benefits for both business owners and employees.

The ILO SCORE Programme in Tunisia has made remarkable strides in enhancing the capabilities of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the textile sector. One of the most significant achievements has been the increase in productivity among participating enterprises and improved competitiveness in the marketplace. Gender inclusion is a key focus of the programme, with a notable increase in women's participation in the training sessions. This has empowered women to take on leadership roles and contribute more significantly to decision-making processes.

The programme also promotes stronger cooperation between employers and employees, helping to create a more cohesive and motivated workforce. This culture of collaboration results in mutual benefits for both workers and businesses. Overall, the SCORE Programme has strengthened SMEs' capabilities in quality management, human resources, and occupational safety, preparing them to succeed in an increasingly competitive global market. These advancements have improved the ability of Tunisian textile SMEs to meet international standards, allowing them to compete more effectively and access new opportunities in global supply chains.

Developing skills and building technical capacities

As the textile sector continues to grow and generate employment, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that workers possess the skills needed to succeed in a rapidly changing industry (see Chapter 2).

The challenges and implications for skills development in the textile and clothing sector are numerous:⁴²

- **Skills gap:** There is a notable gap between the skills demanded by the industry and those possessed by the workforce. Rapid technological advancements and changing consumer preferences necessitate continuous upskilling and reskilling, which many workers may lack access to.
- **Gender equality and vulnerable groups:** Skills development programmes often do not sufficiently focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as low-skilled workers, youth, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and migrant workers. Gender disparities are prevalent within the textiles and clothing sector, with women often occupying lower-paying positions compared to men. Efforts to enhance skills development should prioritize gender

⁴¹ ILO, "[Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises](#)" accessed 06 November 2024.

⁴² ILO, "[Skills Development for a Just Transition](#)", Policy Brief, 2022.

equality and create pathways in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and training for women to access higher-skilled roles.

- **Adaptation to sustainable practices:** As the industry moves towards sustainability, workers need to acquire skills related to eco-friendly manufacturing processes, circular economy principles, and sustainable sourcing. This transition poses challenges for all constituents that are unfamiliar with these practices.

Simultaneously, policymakers and key stakeholders should leverage the following opportunities to create skills for a greener future:⁴³

- **Innovation and technology adoption:** Embracing technological advancements presents opportunities for skills development, particularly in areas such as digital design, automation, and data analytics. Investing in training programmes can equip workers with the expertise needed to thrive in an increasingly digitalized industry.
- **Green jobs and sustainability:** The transition towards sustainability creates demand for skilled professionals capable of implementing and managing eco-friendly practices. Training initiatives focused on sustainability can create new avenues for employment and career advancement within the sector.
- **Cross-sector collaboration:** Collaborative efforts between industry stakeholders, educational institutions, and government agencies can facilitate skills development initiatives tailored to the sector's needs. By aligning training programmes with industry requirements, stakeholders can ensure that workers are equipped with relevant and marketable skills.
- **Promotion of lifelong learning:** Establishing a culture of lifelong learning is essential for addressing skills gaps and maintaining a competitive workforce. Employers can support continuous skills development through on-the-job training, mentorship programs, and educational subsidies.

Employers will increasingly need workers to possess the necessary skills to operate new technologies and work with new materials for efficient and sustainable production in the textiles sector, which will attract investment and enhance profitability. As demand and consumer preferences evolve, low-cost production alone will likely no longer suffice for competitiveness in the industry. Skilled workers are thus essential for maintaining a competitive edge in a constantly changing global market and for advancing decent work for both women and men in the sector. Lifelong learning and continuous training will be crucial to ensuring that both employers and workers can adapt to the rapidly changing industry.

In 2022, the ILO conducted a [comprehensive study on future skills needs in the textile and clothing sector](#), gathering recommendations from government, employer, and worker representatives in Brazil, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Peru. While the context in each country vary, several common themes emerged, such as the need to improve education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems; strengthen connections with the private sector to bridge industry skills gaps and equip both employers and workers with the skills needed for the future of work; and develop digital skills to meet current demands and keep pace with the sector's projected technological advancements.⁴⁴

⁴³ ILO, [“Skills for a greener future: a global view”](#), 2019.

⁴⁴ ILO, [The future of work and skills in the textiles and clothing sector - Anticipating skills needs and finding solutions through social dialogue in Brazil, Ethiopia, Jordan and Peru](#), 2022.

Box 4: Case study: Skills for a Just Transition in Brazil's Textile Industry ⁴⁵

Brazil's textile and clothing sector, one of the largest globally, plays a critical role in the country's economy, generating around USD 49.3 billion annually and employing over 1.5 million people. This workforce, 75% of whom are women, is concentrated primarily in the Southeast, which accounts for nearly 60% of fabric production and 48% of garment output. As the sector adapts to global megatrends like digitalization, environmental sustainability, and evolving consumer preferences, it faces the dual challenge of maintaining international competitiveness while ensuring a just transition for its workforce.

The *Serviço Nacional de Aprendizagem Industrial (SENAI)*, a leading Brazilian institution for industrial vocational training linked to the National Confederation of Industry (CNI), conducted a study on future skills required by Brazil's textile and clothing industries. It highlighted how Industry 4.0 technologies, such as smart textiles, digital manufacturing, and advanced robotics, are reshaping production processes in the country. These innovations are transforming the sector, driving demand for new knowledge, skills and capabilities to remain competitive in the evolving global market, including on chemistry, computer science and programming, machinery maintenance, environmental awareness, etc. To support this transition, new professions need to be developed, such as sustainability specialist, textile technicians in mechatronics, biotechnology specialists for textile fibres and textile beneficiation, digital textile printers, etc.

Based on the findings of the study, a tripartite working group was established to adopt a set of policy recommendations. These serve as a guidance for governments, vocational training institutions, employers' associations, companies, workers organizations, and research institutions to develop future policies and activities in the field of education and training, and technological and organizational upgrading to ensure the industry will have the necessary skills to further develop.

3.3. Social and labour protection

Social protection

Social protection, covered by the international labour standards, provides benefits to individuals based on risks faced across the life cycle, such as unemployment, disability, and maternity. This protection provides a general framework to improve the working conditions and protect vulnerable groups, especially during global crises. The [World Social Protection Report 2024-26](#) highlights that 52.4 per cent of the global population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, though access remains uneven, especially in lower-income countries.

While the social and labour protection benefits are widely recognized, additional investment is still needed to boost the coverage of these schemes worldwide, particularly in lower-income regions and countries.⁴⁶ Efforts are also needed to extend social protection to informal and vulnerable workers, who are often exposed to decent work deficits and lack access to benefits, while ensuring the sustainability of these systems and avoiding poverty traps that may incentivise informality. Comprehensive social protection measures include access to social security benefits, such as unemployment insurance, and pensions which are crucial for providing financial security and support to workers, particularly in times of need.

The profound and rapid changes in the textiles and clothing sector in the past five decades have severely tested social security systems in all parts of the world. In high-income countries, outsourcing and offshoring implied a structural transformation of the industries, which eventually led to thousands of employers went out of business and that millions of workers had to find new jobs. Governments invested considerable resources in the form of trade adjustment assistance for firms, unemployment benefits, early retirement options, job training and relocation allowances for workers. In developing countries, governments are faced with the challenge of putting in place or quickly strengthening social security systems to cover millions of new workers in manufacturing industries. Additionally, they should ensure the sustainability of social protection systems as informality put obvious challenges by reducing revenues and coverage. While these actions have benefitted millions of workers, it is still not clear if the existing or incipient systems of social

⁴⁵ ILO, [Survey on the future demand for vocational training in the textiles sector in Brazil](#), 2021

⁴⁶ ILO, [Social Protection webpage](#), accessed November 2024.

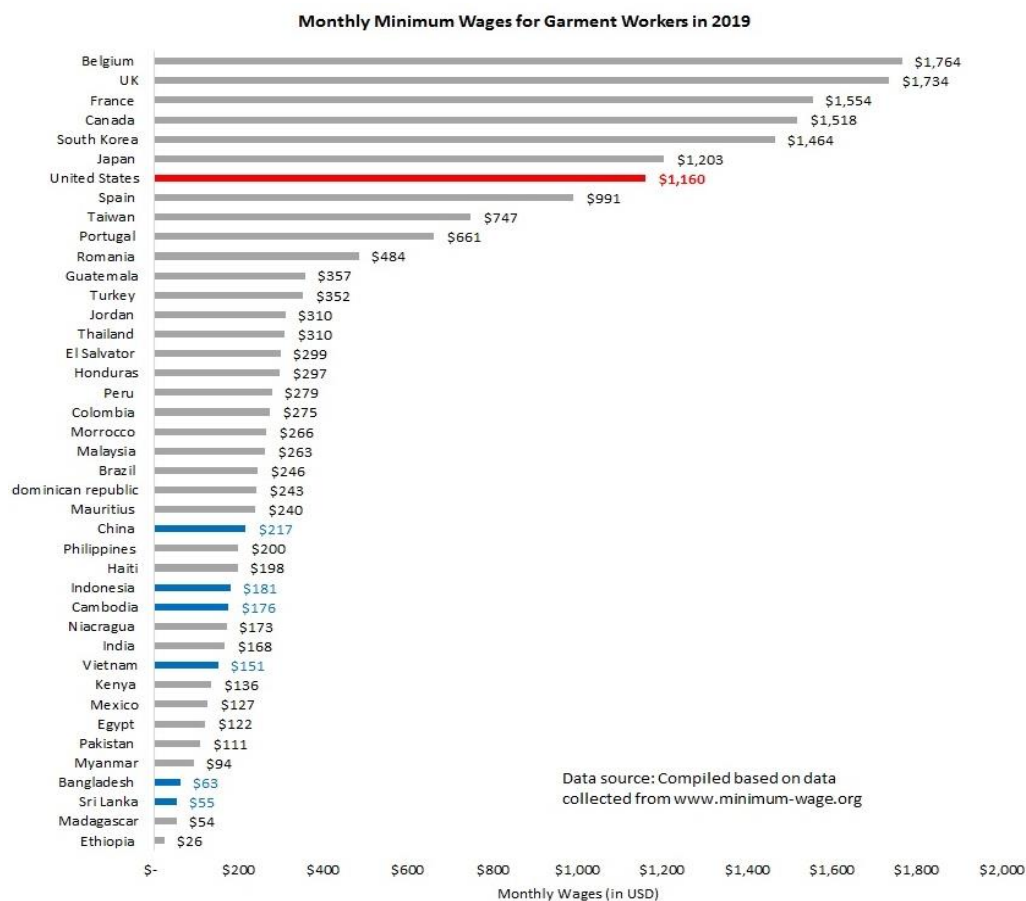
security will be able to cope with the potential large numbers of workers who might lose their jobs and livelihoods as a result of technological advances, globalization, and climate change in the future.⁴⁷ Thus, it is important that social protection systems to be revised and adopted to future transformation of the world of work to ensure all workers are covered and protected.

Labour protection

The setting of adequate wages is an essential mechanism to enable decent living standards and incomes for women and men workers and their families, while at the same time ensuring the sustainability of enterprises which create the jobs for these workers.

Minimum wage levels in the sector are generally low and sometimes do not fulfil the needs of workers and their families. The fulfilment of these needs is sometimes only achieved through excessive overtime work. Wage levels are also influenced by national policies and the price paid by buyers.⁴⁸ A study revealed that, in 2019, monthly minimum wages in developing countries ranged from USD 26 in Ethiopia to USD 357 in Guatemala, while workers in Belgium and the United Kingdom received a monthly average of USD 17364 and 1734 respectively.⁴⁹

Figure 2. Monthly Minimum Wages in Apparel in 2019



⁴⁷ ILO, [The future of work and skills in the textiles and clothing sector - Anticipating skills needs and finding solutions through social dialogue in Brazil, Ethiopia, Jordan and Peru](#), 2022.

⁴⁸ ILO, [Points of Consensus adopted at the ILO Global Dialogue Forum on Wages and Working Hours in the Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Industries](#), Geneva, 2014

⁴⁹ Lu, Sheng Dr. Minimum Wage Level for Garment Workers in the World. University of Delaware Department of Fashion and Apparel Studies, 2020

In February 2024, a [Meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages](#), convened by the ILO, adopted tripartite conclusions on wages policies, including living wages, which were endorsed by the ILO Governing Body at its 350th Session.⁵⁰ The Conclusions provide a joint understanding of the concept of living wage;⁵¹ define the principles that the estimation of living wages should follow; and, state how the operationalization of living wages should consider the ILO principles of wage-setting. Consistent with international labour standards, wage-setting practices should follow an evidence-based approach and be based on collective bargaining and tripartite social dialogue, taking into account the needs of workers and their families as well as economic factors, ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination and considering national circumstances and the root causes of low pay.

In developing countries, the textiles and clothing industry is known for excessive working hours and the lack of adequate rest and recuperation periods, including weekly rest and paid annual leave.⁵² Excessive hours of work impact on workers' health, well-being and workplace safety, and can cause unforeseen indirect costs for companies in the form of accidents, injuries, absenteeism, lower productivity, and high worker turnover with the consequent recruitment of new employees and their training costs.⁵³

Excessive overtime was found in most of clothing factories assessed by the Better Work Programme in various countries. To deal with fluctuations in demand, shorter lead times, falling prices and increased competition, many suppliers keep a group of skilled workers as regular employees. In peak times, workers are required to work long hours eventually with the help of temporary contract workers and subcontracting.⁵⁴ Overtime is also linked to working arrangements such as piece-rate contracts. At the same time, lack of efficient management practices can pose additional constraints to many companies.

The principle of the eight-hour day and 48-hour week, as maximum normal working hours, has been internationally established since 1919, when the first ILO Convention was adopted.⁵⁵ Since then, the ILO has adopted another 21 Conventions, 18 Recommendations and two Protocols on working time.⁵⁶ The Better Work programme has for two decades been driving improvements in productivity and working conditions, including wages and working time, in the textiles and clothing sector (see Box 1).

3.4. Social dialogue and tripartism

Social dialogue, alongside tripartism involving governments, employers, and workers' representatives, is critical to promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all in the sector. As textiles production becomes increasingly geographically dispersed and market-driven changes occur rapidly, social dialogue is becoming more important than ever before to bring stakeholders together to address both opportunities and challenges imposed by the

⁵⁰ Conclusions adopted at the Meeting of Experts on wage policies, including living wages, Geneva, 19-23 February 2024.

⁵¹ "The concept of the living wage is:

- the wage level that is necessary to afford a decent standard of living for workers and their families, taking into account the country circumstances and calculated for the work performed during the normal hours of work;
- calculated in accordance with the ILO's principles of estimating the living wage;
- to be achieved through the wage-setting process in line with ILO principles on wage setting.

The "normal hours" of work refers to the time at the disposal of the employer within the legal working time determined by regulations and national practices. This definition excludes overtime.

⁵² ILO. Wages and Working Hours in the Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Industries, Geneva, 2014.

⁵³ ILO, opus cit.

⁵⁴ S. Barrientos, G. Gereffi and A. Rossi: "Economic and social upgrading in global production networks", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 150, No. 3-4, Geneva, ILO, 2011.

⁵⁵ ILO: Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1)

⁵⁶ Some instruments have been shelved or withdrawn.

transformations in industry (see chapter 2). Moreover, social dialogue is an important tool to mitigate and maximize the impact of the transition to a greener and more digital sector.

Social dialogue in the textiles and clothing sector takes place within and across borders and at both the global, regional, national and enterprise level. In Europe, the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for the Textiles and Clothing brings together representatives from EU Members states to discuss main issues impacting the industry. In South Africa, the National Bargaining Council for the Clothing Manufacturing Industry (NBC) serves as a formal platform for wage agreements and dispute resolution, ensuring fair labour practices. Through social dialogue, South Africa's textiles sector has made progress in securing minimum wages, improving workplace conditions, and fostering economic resilience, despite ongoing challenges in globalization and automation. Crosse-sectoral social dialogue mechanisms are also used in the textiles, clothing, leather and footwear sector, such as the global framework agreements that IndustriALL Global Union has signed with large buyers and brands.⁵⁷

In addition to tripartite dialogue and engagement opportunities offered by the ILO, constituents and other key stakeholders have created innovative and important dialogue platforms to meet and exchange information on some of the most important issues that the sector faces. For instance, the OECD Forum on Due Diligence in the Garment and Footwear Sector is an annual event that brings together main stakeholders in the sector. While the scope and objectives of these initiatives differ, the overarching aim is to promote collective action to enhancing decent work.

Labour administration systems, including labour inspection, remain key to determining whether millions of women and men will continue to toil in poor working conditions and hazardous and unhealthy workplaces, or whether they will be able to enjoy their rights and work in conditions of dignity and freedom. There is an urgent need to increase the capacity of labour inspectorates to address the host of increasingly complex issues and challenges that the textile and clothing sector face in the future.

While these initiatives target important decent work issues, focus should also be placed on addressing all the root causes of governance gaps, including, low capacity of national institutions, systemic non-compliance, lack of access to judicial and administrative remedies, high levels of informality etc. Enhancing public, private and social governance frameworks and institutions should be strengthened to ensure compliance with national legislation and respect and implementation of international labour standards.

3.5. A just transition towards environmental and social sustainability in the textiles and clothing sector

Today, the need for a just transition towards environmental, economic and social sustainability is increasingly recognized. The textiles and clothing sector faces significant challenges, in particular due to its high-water consumption, chemical use and waste generation. The industry is particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change leading, for instance, to increase of temperatures in confined workspaces and flooding.⁵⁸ Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and equitable approach that not only mitigates environmental harm but also ensuring the well-being and rights of workers in the sector.⁵⁹

[Between 2000 and 2015](#), clothing production had doubled, while the duration of garment use decrease 36 per cent⁶⁰. Yet, it is estimated that [92 million tonnes](#) of textile waste is generated worldwide each year. This is equivalent to [a truckload of clothing](#) being incinerated or sent to landfills every second. It is driven by the rapid rise in production and

⁵⁷ ILO. International Framework Agreements in the food retail, garment and chemicals sectors. Lessons learned from three case studies, Geneva, 2018.

⁵⁸ European Parliament, "The Impact of Textile Production and Waste on the Environment", Infographics, 2020.

⁵⁹ ILO, 2022, [Sectoral Policies for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All](#).

⁶⁰ Ellen Macarthur Foundation. A new textiles economy: redesigning fashion's future, 2017

consumption within the textile sector, causing severe environmental, economic, and social issues, especially in the Global South.

The [ILO Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#) outline various strategies to address these challenges. This includes the provision of support to countries in enhancing decent work, skills development, sustainable enterprises and an enabling business environment, robust social protection measures, and social dialogue through collaboration among governments, workers and employers.

In 2023, the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted a [Resolution on a just transition](#), addressing the environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability across all sectors, including the TCLF. While highlighting the role of social dialogue and tripartism, the ILC emphasised the necessity of respecting fundamental labour standards. It also called for the investment in sustainable infrastructure, the development of inclusive supply chains, and the establishment of sector-specific policies that ensure decent work and strengthen social protection mechanisms.

Box 5: Promoting just transition in textiles: the case of Europe

In 2020, textile consumption in Europe ranked fourth in terms of its environmental and climate impact. It also had the third highest impact on water and land use, and the fifth highest for raw material usage and greenhouse gas emissions. Each person in the EU consumed on average 14.8 kg of textiles while exports of used textiles tripled over the past two decades, from 550,000 tonnes in 2000 to almost 1.7 million in 2019. Natural gas is the main energy for the industry, which means that a green transition will require considerable investments.

Textiles is one of the key value chains in the [EU circular economy action plan](#), the [EU strategy for sustainable and circular textiles](#), and the EU sustainable products initiative. The [European industrial strategy](#) is also crucial for advancing the objectives of the [European Green Deal](#). The EU is exploring circular business model pathways that could facilitate the transition to a circular textiles system, emphasizing the pivotal role of the design phase. These models should prioritize product longevity and durability, optimized resource utilization, collection and reuse, and recycling and material use.

EU companies are, at their scale, attempting to drive positive change towards a just transition. Around 32 per cent of EU textiles SMEs indicated the use of recycled materials, while 42 per cent of surveyed companies adopted a green technologies or new green business models. These changes towards sustainability should also be reflected in terms of skills development to create a better environment and future for workers.

► 4. Conclusion

As technological advancements, climate change and other drivers of change reshape the textiles and clothing sector, the need to advance both decent work and environmental sustainability has never been more urgent.

While this sector remains a vital source of economic growth and employment, particularly for women, it faces significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure its long-term viability and alignment with global goals for decent work, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Ensuring decent work across the textiles and clothing sector remains a foremost concern. Despite the significant contribution of the sector to global employment, millions of workers still endure poor working conditions, such as excessive working hours and inadequate social protection. Gender inequalities also persist, underscoring the urgent need for stronger enforcement of labour rights, adequate living wages, and an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, especially in countries where labour laws are either weak or unenforced.

Technological advances, such as automation and digitalization, are reshaping production processes and supply chains in unprecedented ways. While these changes promise improvements in productivity and efficiency, they also risk job displacement and widening the skills gap. Workers and employers alike risk losing out if proactive measures are not taken to upskill and reskill the current workforce. By investing in skills development and lifelong learning, the sector can prepare its workers for the future of work and avoid that technological progress exacerbates existing inequalities.

The industry's considerable environmental footprint also demands urgent action. As the shift towards greener production and circular economy models accelerates it becomes critical to ensure that the transition becomes just and job-rich and that no-one is left behind.

The ILO plays a critical role in supporting this transition. By working with governments, employers' and workers' organizations to strengthen labour standards, improve working conditions, and promote skills development and a just transition in the sector, the ILO helps ensure that the textiles and clothing sector becomes more equitable and sustainable. Social dialogue remains a key tool in this process, enabling collective problem-solving and fostering stronger, more resilient outcomes and collaboration between ILO constituents as well as other key stakeholders.



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