

Committee : International Labour Organisation

Issue: Training and practicing the professions of 2030

Author: Pakistan

Pakistan is in South-Asia. Approximately 96% of Pakistan's population is Muslim, and the constitution ensures that laws respect Sharia principles while recognizing religious minorities' rights. National values are deeply influenced by Islam, emphasizing brotherhood, solidarity, and justice for the vulnerable. Diplomatically, Pakistan has strong ties with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and maintains relationships with Turkey, Gulf countries, and the United States, although these have varied over time.

Pakistan has ratified several laws to regulate labor relations and protect workers' rights, though enforcement is often inconsistent. Key among these laws is the « Factories Act of 1934 » which regulates working conditions in factories, particularly regarding health, safety, and working hours. Although this law is quite old, it continues to set minimum protection standards in manufacturing.

The « Industrial Relations Act of 2012 » represents a significant step forward in labor rights, guaranteeing the right to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. However, unions remain fragile due to economic and political pressures, limiting their ability to effectively protect workers. Additionally, the « Minimum Wages Ordinance of 1961 » establishes a minimum wage for workers, but in practice, wages often fail to meet basic living standards.

Another critical piece of legislation is the « Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1992 », which seeks to eradicate debt-based forced labor. While this law has criminalized these practices, they persist in certain rural areas and in the informal sector, where many workers remain excluded from legal protections.

Pakistan is gradually adopting AI to modernize several sectors of its economy, including finance, healthcare, and agriculture. AI and automation promise to boost productivity but also risk disrupting employment for low-skilled workers, by increasing inequalities. By 2030, broader AI adoption could widen the gap between skilled workers, who can adapt to new technologies, and those left behind. The Pakistani government has launched initiatives, such as educational programs focused on AI, to train the younger generation and prepare the workforce for future jobs.

However, the transition to a digital economy poses challenges. Limited infrastructure, particularly the lack of internet access in rural areas, and a shortage of trained professionals slow Pakistan's progress in this area.

Psychologically, Pakistani workers face numerous challenges. Employment insecurity is a significant stressor, especially in the informal sector, where legal protections are almost non-existent. Job insecurity and the lack of social coverage create an unstable work environment, leading to anxiety and mental health issues among many workers.

Long working hours, often under harsh physical conditions, contribute to mental health problems as well. Although laws like the « Factories Act » are intended to limit working hours, abuses are common, particularly in industries that are not well monitored. A lack of recognition and workplace abuse, including harassment, further exacerbates the situation. Women, in particular, face discrimination and harassment despite the existence of laws such as the « Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2010 ».

Unions also play a crucial role in workers' mental health. In theory, unions offer support not only in terms of working conditions but also psychologically, by allowing workers to express themselves and feel represented. However, their influence remains limited due to structural weaknesses in Pakistan's labor movement.

By 2030, Pakistan's labor situation could improve if the government continues its reforms and strengthens the enforcement of existing laws. Consolidation of labor legislation, like the process currently underway in the Sindh province, could provide better protection for workers, including those in the informal sector. Integrating informal workers into the formal economy is crucial for reducing inequality and ensuring everyone has access to social benefits and labor rights.

The adoption of technologies like AI and automation will also transform the economic landscape, but careful management will be needed to avoid an increase in unemployment and inequality. Retraining low-skilled workers and improving technological infrastructure will be priorities to maximize the benefits of this transformation while minimizing its negative effects.

In conclusion, Pakistan is at a critical juncture for the future of its workers (especially in textile industry). The effective implementation of legislative reforms, combined with a balanced adoption of emerging technologies, could improve working conditions and the well-being of workers by 2030. For this, employees of international companies must be paid better. Social contribution of international companies and local subcontractors must increase. The Pakistan can be attractive to foreign investors only if the other countries put in place guidelines. However, without careful attention to the challenges of law enforcement and the management of technological transitions, risks of deepening inequalities and deteriorating worker well-being persist.