



International  
Labour  
Organization



# ASIAN DECENT WORK DECADE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE KIT

ASIAN  
DECENT WORK  
DECADE 2006  
2015

Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

**DECENT WORK**

A better world starts here.

2nd  
Edition

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**ASIAN DECENT WORK DECADE:  
INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE KIT**

# Foreword

The launch of the Asian Decent Work Decade during the Fourteenth Asian Regional Meeting of the International Labour Organization in 2006 was a significant step forward in the world of work in the Asia-Pacific region. Working people, female or male, young or old, skilled or unskilled – all stand to benefit from the realization of decent work goals for a fair share of the fruits of this region's stunning economic growth.

However, many observers rightly wonder how we can achieve the decent work goals in only one decade. Since that landmark meeting, countries in the region have experienced profound change. At the time of the regional meeting and in the following year, annual output growth in the region was the highest in decades. That growth and accompanying developments came under threat in 2008 when countries started to bear the full brunt of the global financial and economic crises. Obviously, those challenges increased the already enormous task countries in the region had ahead of them in achieving the decent work goals.

Since the 2006 regional meeting, the International Labour Conference has adopted two major frameworks for action: i) The Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, adopted by the ILO's tripartite constituency in 2008, reflects consensus on the role of decent work in realizing social justice for a fair globalization; and ii) The ILO Global Jobs Pact, adopted in June 2009, applies the Decent Work Agenda to crisis response. The pact aims to ensure that the recovery from the crisis addressed the fault lines of globalization through the expansion of decent work opportunities. In the Asia-Pacific region the good and hopeful news is that recovery is on its way. The ILO is assisting constituents in realizing the goals through a growing list of Decent Work Country Programmes designed according to national priorities and needs.

To support countries in their efforts to achieve their goals, the ILO is constantly improving its services – both with what it offers and how it delivers. In this connection, two things are clear:

- The ILO's strength lies in what it knows, whether held in documents or in the minds of its people, and is based on the experiences we draw from our work.
- We have to share what we know.

The *Asian Decent Work Decade Resource Kit* is a way of communicating the ILO's knowledge via advances in technology and the Internet. The kit's guiding principles are simplicity and accessibility and the organizing framework reflects our regional priority areas of action. Since its release in 2008, the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific devised a regional knowledge sharing strategy to guide our work in the area of knowledge management, as follows:

- strengthen internal capacities to codify crucial lessons, collect valuable resources and maintain networks of staff connected to relevant resources;
- create Communities of Practices to foster mutual capacity building, leverage resources in ILO areas of work and connect ILO constituents with each other, other stakeholders and partners; and
- apply ILO expertise to generate timely, evidence-based policy advice, shape regional labour agendas and create demand-responsive tools, methods, approaches and systems.

This introductory booklet explains the genesis of the Asian Decent Work Decade and how the ILO intends to support constituents in the Asia-Pacific region in their efforts to achieve the goals. The accompanying five booklets serve as gateways into ILO expertise and knowledge in the five priority areas, outlining the challenges and providing information, resources, examples and access to useful ILO tools. I hope this second version of the resource kit will contribute in its own modest way to bringing decent work for all closer to reality.

Sachiko Yamamoto  
ILO Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific

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# Acknowledgements

The *Asian Decent Work Decade Resource Kit* is a collaborative product resulting from contributions of many people. It is dedicated to everyone working on making decent work a reality and those who have shared their expertise and resources verbally and through publications, project documents, mission reports and hand-written notes.

Developed as a living document, this resource kit was first published in 2008 and updated for this version (2nd edition). Its purpose remains to ensure that International Labour Organization constituents, colleagues, donors and other interested parties have access to state-of-the-art knowledge on the various priorities in the Asia-Pacific region to drive the Decent Work Agenda.

The kit has benefited from substantial contributions and support by the previous and current Regional Directors of the ILO, respectively Ng Gek Boo and Sachiko Yamamoto. Guy Thijs, Deputy Regional Director, developed the concept and guided the development of the first version and current update from start to conclusion. David Tajgman was responsible for the initial format, while Stephan Ulrich wrote extensive portions and coordinated the process towards finalization. Peter Stalker assisted with editing, rewriting, reformatting and adding illustrations to make the first version of the various booklets consistent. Karen Emmons edited both versions. Thanks are also due to Sophy Fisher, Chanitda Wiwatchanon, Johan Arvling and Kwantawan Hongladarom for their assistance and advice with the editing process, design and layout in the accompanying web site.

The initial authors of the booklets are Peter Stalker and Manolo Abella on migration, Michael Lerner and Abhik Ghosh on labour market governance, Uma Sarkar on youth employment, Stephan Ulrich on competitiveness, productivity and jobs, and Ginette Forgues and Stephan Ulrich on local development. The updated version benefited from inputs by Kee Beom Kim, Gyorgy Sziraczki, Matthew Cognac, Sandra Yu, Chris Donnges, Max Tunon, Carmela Torres, Vincent Jugault, John Ritchotte, Wolfgang Schiefer and Guy Thijs.

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# Abbreviations

ADWD	Asian Decent Work Decade
CEB	Chief Executives Board
COP	Communities of Practice
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programme
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
MDG	Millennium Development Goals

# Navigating the booklets

This resource kit offers a brief introduction to the ILO's knowledge base on the Asia-Pacific region. If you want more detail, the CD-ROM gives links to further reading, guides, data, projects and web sites. The resource kit can be useful to people who have a general interest in the issues as well as specialists who need additional technical resources.

If you are reading this as an electronic file on the CD-ROM, you will find hyperlinks to many associated publications, also on the CD-ROM. If your computer is connected to the Internet you can use other hyperlinks to navigate to web sites. The links are both in the text and in boxes on the side margin marked "click here".

If you are reading this as a printed booklet, you can find more information by visiting the web sites: [www.ilo.org/asia](http://www.ilo.org/asia) or [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org).

# 1. The Asian Decent Work Decade

## The region's world of work in the coming decade

The Asia-Pacific region is playing an increasingly important role in the global economy and in global development. Over the past two decades, the region's share of global gross domestic product has risen, from around 20 per cent in 1990 to around 35 per cent in 2010, driven in large part by developments in China and India.

Over the past decade, rapid growth – albeit interrupted by the 2008–2009 financial and economic crises – helped lift millions of households out of poverty and reduced the numbers of the working poor in the region. But progress has been uneven. Significant declines have taken place in East Asia, driven by China, but slower progress is evident in the Pacific and in South Asia.

The region's nearly 858 million working poor account for around 70 per cent of the world's total. In 2009, nearly half of all workers in Asia were living in households earning less than US\$2 per day. In South Asia, the figure was higher, at three of every four workers.

Developing Asia is characterized by a massive informal economy in which millions of workers are unprotected by law and earn too little to escape poverty. For example, informal employment accounts for 96 per cent of all workers in Nepal, nearly 80 per cent in Bangladesh and more than 60 per cent in Indonesia.

These trends highlight the reality that despite strong growth in recent decades, not all parts of society benefit equally. This also underlines the importance for countries in the region to move towards income-led growth patterns. Decent and productive employment is the primary route out of poverty, and the ILO is working across the region to make decent employment a central goal of national economic and development policies and plans.

At the Fourteenth Asian Regional Meeting (in the Republic of Korea, 2006), representatives of governments and employers' and workers' organizations considered these scenarios and expressed their conviction that the ILO's Decent Work Agenda could



Governments across the region are committed to ensuring decent work for all. ©ILO/T.Falaise, 2007.

[Click here for Realizing Decent Work in Asia](#)

[Click here for the Conclusions from the Asian Regional Meeting 2006](#)

contribute to a sustainable route out of poverty and make an important impact towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The representatives committed themselves to an Asian Decent Work Decade – for the period up to 2015 – during which, across this diverse Asia-Pacific region, countries will make a concerted and sustained effort to realize decent work for all. The 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting will provide an excellent opportunity to review the progress that has been made and highlight the challenges that remain ahead.

## 2. ILO's contribution to the Asian Decent Work Decade

Since the 2005 World Summit of the United Nations General Assembly, international and national leaders have agreed that if their countries are to overcome poverty and achieve sustainable development they need to ensure full and productive employment and decent work for all. The

ILO is thus helping member States adopt the decent work goals as national objectives. In accordance with national characteristics and possibilities, the ILO combines advocacy, demonstration and cooperation to help countries define and implement decent work strategies.

*What is decent work? It is the aspirations of all people for their working lives: for work that is productive, delivers a fair income with security and social protection, safeguards their basic rights and offers equality of opportunity and treatment, prospects for personal development, the chance for recognition and the chance to have their opinions heard.*

[Click here for the ILO web site on the Decent Work Agenda](#)

*The overall goal of the ILO is decent work for all women and men in all countries. This is captured in four strategic objectives: i) fundamental principles and rights at work and international labour standards; ii) employment and income opportunities; iii) social protection and social security; and iv) social dialogue and tripartism. These objectives apply to all workers: women and men in both formal and informal economies, in waged or working on their own account, in fields, factories and offices, in their homes or in their communities.*

## Decent Work Country Programmes

The ILO assists member States through the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), which in turn links to the ILO's global results-based management framework. Through the DWCP, the tripartite constituents in each country set attainable decent work goals and outcomes. Countries also can join in subregional, regional or international ILO initiatives or programmes.

*The ILO's goal of Decent Work for All and the pledges of the UN Millennium Declaration go hand in hand. The ILO has developed an information folder illustrating how the Decent Work Agenda – embodied in the Asian Decent Work Decade – contributes to the eight Millennium Development Goals.*

Once approved, the DWCP details become available to the public. On a biennial basis, country programme outcomes are prioritized for implementation, and integrated with global ILO outcomes through outcome-based workplans.

## The One UN reform

In 1997, the United Nations Secretary-General launched a comprehensive reform programme to prepare the UN for the challenges of the twenty-first century. His call for a common, articulated vision and strategy for all UN agencies manifested as a “One UN” model. Operational approaches for the One UN are currently being piloted in eight countries, two of which are in Asia: Pakistan and Viet Nam. Lessons learned in these countries will inform the future of the One UN concept.

*In 2006 the UN Economic and Social Council approved a ministerial declaration encouraging the UN system to develop a toolkit to promote decent work. Since then, the ILO has worked closely with other agencies through the Chief Executives Board, chaired by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. The global financial and economic crises have further emphasized the need to fully integrate the ILO's decent work approach into a broader economic and social strategy to stimulate recovery and shape a fair globalization. The CEB Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work is used to place decent work at the heart of sustainable national development strategies and UN Development Assistance Frameworks.*

[Click here for the CEB Toolkit for Mainstreaming Employment and Decent Work](#)

Decent Work Country Documents define the ILO's programmatic contribution within the One UN framework. Each country programme enables the ILO and tripartite constituents to work closely with the United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions and donors to integrate the objectives of full and productive employment, poverty alleviation and decent work strategies into policy dialogue and programming cycles.

## Standards and technical cooperation



Decent work is safe work backed by labour standards. ©ILO/K.Cassidy, 2003.

In a globalized economy achieving the decent work goals requires action at the international level. The world community is responding in part with legal instruments

on trade, finance, the environment, human rights and labour. The ILO contributes to this by elaborating and promoting international labour standards, which are the basic minimum social principles agreed by all players in the global economy. The ILO's unique tripartite structure also ensures that governments, employers and workers respect these standards.

[Click here for the ILO web site on international labour standards](#)

These standards, combined with technical cooperation, enable the ILO to support the Decent Work Agenda at the national level. The ILO's extensive network of offices throughout the Asia-Pacific region provide technical guidance on policy issues and assistance in the design and implementing of development programmes – building bridges between labour standards and the people who want to achieve them.

*Technical cooperation projects are implemented through close collaboration between recipient countries, donors and the ILO, which maintains a worldwide network of area and regional offices. Projects receive support from individual governments as well as from the European Union, UN agencies, the World Bank, regional development banks, employers' and workers' organizations and industry associations.*



## 3. Regional priority areas

The ILO is determined to improve its services – what it offers and how it delivers. Five regional priority areas of action define the framework:

1. competitiveness, productivity and jobs;
2. youth employment;
3. protecting migrant workers;
4. labour market governance; and
5. social protection, employability and local development.

Each booklet within this resource kit discusses one area in detail.



A competitive economy requires high levels of skill. ©ILO/T.Falise, 2007.

### Competitiveness, productivity and jobs

A country's competitiveness in the global economy is a function of many complex, often interrelated factors: the macroeconomic environment, the quality of public institutions, technological readiness and innovation, physical infrastructure and the availability of labour with appropriate skills.

There is little doubt that countries within Asia and the Pacific are steadily becoming more competitive, thanks to rapid growth and productivity hikes, large inflows of investment capital, and the region's emergence as a hub for outsourcing and off-shoring. Yet challenges remain. With levels of productivity in the Asia-Pacific region significantly lower than in other industrialized parts of the world, a critical challenge is to accelerate productivity growth and translate the gains into higher incomes and sustainable job creation.

In particular, wage growth has not kept pace with productivity growth in many countries

[Click here for the booklet Competitiveness, Productivity and Jobs](#)

and restoring a better link between the two will be crucial for ensuring broad increases in living standards.

Policies to improve productivity and competitiveness have to recognize the region's diversity and harmonize each country's level of development, available resources and institutional capacity. The main objectives should foster an environment that is conducive to job creation by sustainable enterprises, build human capital through basic education as well as technical and core skills, encourage the application of decent and productive workplace practices, address sector-specific challenges through value-chain and cluster upgrading, and promote technologies and ways of doing business that are environmentally friendly.

## Youth employment challenge

If the Asian Decent Work Decade is to succeed, countries will need to provide more decent work opportunities and access to entrepreneurship for young women and men. While unemployment has risen generally, the brunt has been borne by young workers: although only one in five workers are between the ages of 15 and 24, this groups accounts for almost half of the

region's jobless. For many of the young working poor, however, unemployment is a luxury - they often have no choice but to work long hours, unprotected against hazards and risks, on precarious contracts with low pay and few prospects.

Undeniably, young people are an incredible source of energy and creativity and are capable of offering new ideas and insights that are important for driving economic growth. Stifling this potential is an economic and social waste. Greater access to decent employment means giving young people a chance to work themselves and their families out of poverty. The approach of the ILO and its constituents places employment and youth at the heart of economic and social policies with targeted interventions to overcome the specific disadvantages they

[Click here for the booklet \*The Youth Employment Challenge\*](#)



Young people are a source of new ideas and insights. ©ILO/T.Falise, 2008.

face when entering and remaining in the labour market. For this purpose, the ILO has developed technical expertise and capacity for leadership in the following areas:

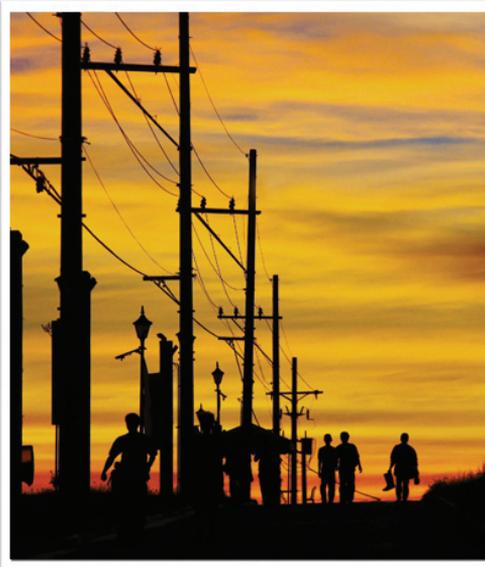
- enhancing the knowledge base on the youth labour market;
- expanding the understanding of policy and programme interventions that ease the transition from school to work;
- providing technical advice and tools on skills training and career guidance to increase the employability of in-school and out-of-school youth;
- providing technical advice and tools for promoting entrepreneurship to increase productive and sustainable self-employment opportunities; and
- enabling the tripartite constituency, and in particular employers and workers and their organizations, to engage in policy development.

The ILO's technical competence, combined with its principles-based and life-cycle perspective means that it is in a strong position to work with countries in addressing the multiple challenges of youth unemployment, underemployment and poor working conditions.

## Protecting migrant workers

Since the 1980s, the number of people in the region migrating for employment has tripled, to more than 3 million annually. The number of migrants is expected to grow further as a result of deepening regional integration, demographic evolution and economic disparities. This large flow of workers has enormous consequences for the migrants, their families and their

[Click here for the booklet \*Protecting Migrant Workers\*](#)



Migrants returning home. ©ILO/J.B.Go, 2006.

countries of origin and destination. Migrants and their home countries benefit from remittances, which amount to billions of dollars for the region as a whole, and in many countries dwarf official development assistance and foreign direct investment. At the same time, the arrival of hard-working labourers fills labour shortages and boosts the economy of the destination countries.

But migration also has its costs. Migrant workers in certain sectors are vulnerable to human trafficking and labour exploitation. There are increasing numbers of women migrants, particularly domestic workers, for whom labour legislation offers little protection.

For origin countries, the income from remittances has to be offset against the departure of many of the most ambitious and talented workers who would otherwise contribute to national development.

By definition the governance of international labour migration requires cooperation between origin and destination countries. To address some of the challenges involved, the ILO has a number of initiatives in the region to promote bilateral and multinational collaboration among member States and social partners.

Activities in this area include:

- global networking on the governance of labour migration;
- Asia regional dialogues;
- advisory services;
- training;
- policy training and tools development;
- direct assistance to women and men migrants; and
- policy research.

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## Labour market governance

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Labour market governance refers to the policies, norms, laws, regulations, institutions, machinery and processes that influence the demand and supply of labour. Improving labour market governance implies reviewing its various elements to ensure that the outcomes they produce are efficient, fair and equitable. The ILO's work in this priority area has four dimensions:

*Labour market reforms* – Most Asia-Pacific countries are continuously reforming their labour markets to respond to changing

economic and social demands and to accommodate the interests of both employers and workers. ILO activity in this area includes advice on labour law reform and promoting international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work. Of particular interest in the Asia-Pacific region is legislation on employment promotion and protection, discrimination and harassment, minimum wage setting and industrial relations.



Trade union meeting in Pakistan. ©ILO/M.Crozet, 2005.

*Industrial relations* – The ILO works directly on industrial relations and acts as a catalyst for local institutions. Unique among international players in the field, the ILO promotes tripartism and social dialogue. Across the region, it deals with issues of wage policy, collective bargaining practices, labour–management cooperation and labour dispute settlement machinery.

*Labour administration* – The ILO supports national efforts to improve labour administration systems in the areas of policy setting, formulation and implementation. Working areas include labour inspection, employment services, vocational education and skills development, social security, the informal economy, occupational safety and health, and research and statistics.

*Social dialogue* – This includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between or among representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common concern. How social dialogue actually operates varies from country to country and from region to region. The ILO encourages workers and employers, along with governments, to engage in social dialogue on issues of mutual interest relating to economic and social policy.

*What is tripartism? It refers to the involvement of representatives of government, employers and workers in dealing with matters of common concern. The ILO is tripartite in all aspects of its work, uniting governments, employers and workers in processes that give life to plans and actions to meet the challenges in the world of work.*

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## Social protection, employability and local development

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Access to adequate social protection is recognized as a basic human right. It is also considered to be instrumental in promoting human welfare, social consensus, inclusive growth and competitiveness. The ILO's strategy for extending social protection follows a horizontal dimension, which establishes a minimum set of basic services that everyone must have access to, and a vertical dimension, which provides for higher levels of protection, such as pension schemes, unemployment insurance and social health insurance, to the extent that the national economy permits.

Social protection helps to activate labour market policies. A minimum level of education and adequate health care and nutrition enhance the employability of workers and their receptivity to vocational training. Income support for job searching, family benefits for child care and the provision of basic living facilities can be offered through an arrangement in which certain conditions are fulfilled that improve employability, such as attending training,



Women in the village work together to produce clothes. ©ILO/M.Crozet, 2002.

seeking employment and accepting jobs. An integral part of social protection is an occupational safety and health component to ensure strong health and productivity of a country's workforce. HIV-prevention strategies are also important to social protection, involving workplace programmes, dialogue, non-discrimination and development of national and workplace policies.

Public employment programmes create short-term work for unskilled and semi-skilled workers belonging to poor and vulnerable households and provide income support. Employment services further promote inclusion in the labour market. Job matching, support for business creation, skills development and subsidies and incentives for companies to hire workers

all constitute employment promotion measures that can be linked to social protection. Subnational levels of governance have become crucial agents in the development of a country's citizens because they are most effective in reaching the poor and vulnerable. Relevant measures include the effective delivery of basic services, health promotion by primary care units (including occupational health), health insurance for the poor and tripartite dialogue towards peaceful industrial

relations. Local employment services are better adapted to local conditions: Training in basic competencies and job requisites need to respond to local opportunities; information about vacancies and business opportunities must be based on close contact with enterprises. Overall, local governments are important actors in creating an enabling environment for local investment, ultimately giving fruition to national goals and programmes.

*[Click here for the booklet Social Protection, Employability and Local Development](#)*



## 4. Knowledge management

During the Asian Forum on Growth, Employment and Decent Work (Beijing, 2007), constituents expressed support for a regional initiative that improves access to knowledge, tools and guidelines related to achieving the decent work goals. The ILO Regional Office reviewed various ways of sharing knowledge and then embarked on a few simple and cost-effective initiatives that would show the value of improved knowledge management. Depending on the topic and the target group, the knowledge is available through web sites, publications, meetings or Communities of Practice. In response, The Regional Office devised and put in motion a regional knowledge sharing strategy to guide its work in the area of knowledge management, as follows:

- strengthen internal capacities to codify lessons, collect valuable resources and maintain networks of staff connected to relevant resources;
- apply ILO expertise to generate timely, evidence-based policy advice, shape regional labour agendas and create demand-responsive tools, methods, approaches and systems; and
- create Communities of Practices

(CoPs) to foster mutual capacity building, leverage resources in ILO areas of work and connect ILO constituents with each other, other actors and partners.

CoPs are at the centre of this strategy and serve as the vehicle to facilitate creative interaction and real-time knowledge sharing of ideas, resources and experiences with and between constituents. Five CoPs have been created, with a focus on the priority areas identified by constituents:

1. Skills and employability (Skills and Employability - <http://skills-ap.ilobkk.or.th>)
2. Green jobs (Green Jobs-AP - <http://greenjobs-ap.ilobkk.or.th>)
3. Youth employment (APYouthNet - <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th>)
4. Migration (AP-MagNet - <http://apmagnet.ilobkk.or.th>)
5. Industrial relations (AP-IRNet - <http://ap-irnet.ilobkk.or.th>)

ILO-sponsored CoPs are owned and driven by their respective members. Although each CoP is at a different stage of maturity, they are all designed and customized to improve knowledge sharing and networking.

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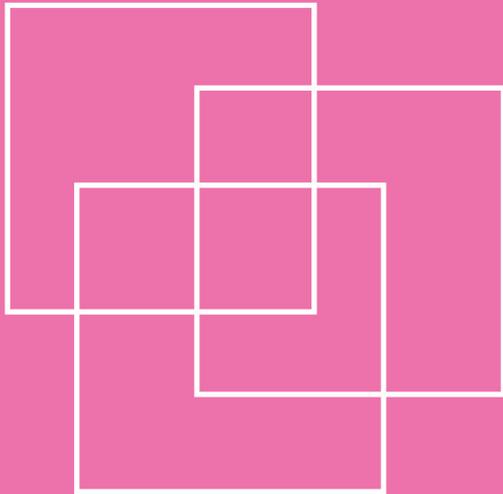
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The Resource Kit brings together the ILO's expertise, knowledge and tools as they relate to Decent Work and the goals of the Asian Decent Work Decade (2006-2015) in a single, accessible package. It has been created to help workers, employers, governments and other interested parties learn more about the priority areas, the key challenges and the resources available to meet them.

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