The Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets series provides key features of employment and environmental sustainability performance. Jobs that are green and decent are central to sustainable development and resource productivity. They respond to the global challenges of environmental protection, economic development and social inclusion. Such jobs create decent employment opportunities, enhance resource efficiency and build low-carbon, sustainable societies. The fact sheets include the most recent available data for selected indicators on employment and environmental sustainability: (i) employment in environmental sectors; (ii) skill levels; (iii) vulnerability of jobs; (iv) jobs in renewable energy; and (v) scoring on the Environmental Performance Index.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is located in western Asia and shares a border with Armenia and Azerbaijan to the north-west, Turkmenistan to the north-east, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east and Turkey and Iraq to the west (Fig. 1). Its population is mostly urban and growing, with a fertility rate of 1.7 children and life expectancy at 75.6 years. Around 71 per cent of the population is of legal working age (15–64 years) (Fig. 2).

Note: All data for 2016, except fertility and life expectancy, which are 2015.

1. The fact sheet is based on available data only.
2. The Islamic Republic of Iran became a member of the International Labour Organization in 1919.
As of 2017, the labour force participation rate is 44.8 per cent and the employment-to-population ratio is 39.7 per cent. Both of those rates are more than 50 percentage points higher for men than for women. The total unemployment rate is 11.3 per cent, and the youth unemployment rate is 26.7 per cent, with the female youth rate 18.8 percentage points higher than the male rate (Fig. 3). The youth (aged 15–24 years) not in employment, education or training was 34.4 per cent in 2010. Formal employment is heavily reliant on services and on medium-skilled occupations, although the industry sector accounts for more than 30 per cent of total employment (Fig. 3).

Vulnerable employment in the Islamic Republic of Iran accounts for 39.6 per cent of the labour force, with the majority of those workers having own-account status (Fig. 4). Own-account and contributing family workers are more likely to experience low job and income security than employees and employers, as well as lower coverage by social protection systems and employment regulation.

According to the *World Risk Report*, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a low World Risk Index score. Despite its low exposure to natural hazards, it ranks 111 (out of 171 countries), because of its limited coping capacity. Additionally, the 1.3 per cent of the total population who lived in the 0.8 per cent of total land area below 5 meters above sea level in 2010 contributes to its vulnerability. According to the Emergency Events Database, there was a spike in natural disasters and associated damage costs in the 1990s, but otherwise no clear trend since the 1950s (Fig. 5). The natural disasters in that time were mostly storms, floods and droughts which resulted in 1,350 deaths. Developing preventive measures to limit infrastructure and property damage and increase institutional capacity, particularly for small businesses to respond to climate events, can be a source of decent job creation while building resilience.
The Islamic Republic of Iran ranks 105 of 180 countries in the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), with a score of 66.3 (with 0 being furthest from the high-performance benchmark target of 100). The country outperforms the average score for Asia and the Pacific (Fig. 6) in two of the EPI environmental health categories (air quality and water and sanitation) and in two of the ecosystem vitality categories (water resources and agriculture). Still, there is significant room for improvement in most of the environmental areas, especially in environmental health (in health impacts) and in ecosystem vitality (in fisheries, biodiversity and climate and energy). Action to improve environmental health, ecosystem vitality, climate change and resilience to weather disasters all have the potential to provide job creation, green economy growth and innovation in the country.

Rural population growth was a negative 0.7 per cent in 2015. The share of agricultural land in total land area, although still large, decreased between 1991 and 2014, while agricultural employment increased from 3.36 million to 4.25 million people. The share of agricultural employment in total employment fell by approximately 8 percentage points due to faster job creation in other sectors (Fig. 7). The share of protected forest area increased between 1990 and 2014, to approximately 6.6 per cent of total land area. During that same time, terrestrial protected area also increased slightly, to 7.3 per cent, while the share of marine protected area amounted to 2.2 per cent of total territorial waters (Fig. 8). In 2016, 18 per cent of employment was in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (Fig. 9). Although reliance on agriculture is moderate, there are opportunities for job creation for sustainable production and organic
farming. There will be greater prospects for employment opportunities if there is commitment to transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy, such as jobs in resource management and environmental services.\(^9\)

**Figure 7. Agricultural land and agricultural employment, 1991–2014**

- Agricultural land (% of land area)
- Employment in agriculture (% of total employment)
- Agricultural employment (million, 2nd axis)


Since 1990, the percentage of the population with access to improved water supply has increased from 92.2 per cent to 96.1 per cent in 2015. There was an 18.6-percentage point increase in access to improved sanitation between 1990 and 2015, reaching 90 per cent (Fig. 9). Both rates, however, are still below the ideal threshold of 100 per cent (Fig. 10). Municipal solid waste generation was 0.16 kg per capita per day in 2005 but is expected to increase to 0.6 kg per capita per day by 2025.\(^{10}\) The largest share of the waste in 2005 was organic (at 43 per cent),\(^{11}\) followed by paper (at 22 per cent), and plastic (at 11 per cent) (Fig. 11).\(^{12}\) Only 0.4 per cent of the country’s labour force was employed in water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities in 2016 (Fig. 9). Improvement in water and sanitation access and municipal waste management system for collection, safe and sustainable disposal, recycling and composting practices will provide decent job opportunities in the future.

**Figure 9. Employment in sectors with strong green jobs potential, 2015**

Agriculture, forestry and fishing
- Mining and quarrying
- Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply
- Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities

Note: These sectors have the most potential for green job opportunities. Employment by selected 1-digit sector (ISIC-Rev. 4, 2008).

12. ibid.
Figure 10. Improved sanitation and water supply access, 1990–2015


Figure 11. Waste composition, 2005


In 2014, more than 95 per cent of the population relied primarily on clean fuel and technology,13 in the sense that they do not create indoor pollution within the home. The share of renewable energy in total energy consumption, however, has not kept pace with overall consumption. It was 45.6 per cent in 2000 but fell below 40 per cent by 2009 and continued to decline to 38.1 per cent in 2014 (Fig. 12). Renewable energy generation increased slightly between 2011 and 2013 but has since declined, with hydropower the main source of renewable energy in 2015 (Fig. 13). In 2016, approximately 39,700 people were employed in the renewable energy sector, with 97 per cent of them in large hydropower facilities (Fig. 14). The country’s employment rate in electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning was only 0.7 per cent in 2016 (Fig. 9). With the push for increasing reliance on renewable energy, there will be greater potential for decent job opportunities in the future.

Figure 12. Renewable energy share in total final energy consumption, 2000–14


Figure 13. Renewable energy generation, 2011–15

Total renewable energy electricity generation (GWh)


Renewable energy electricity generation (GWh), by technology 2015


13. The proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology is calculated as the number of people using clean fuels and technologies for cooking, heating and lighting divided by total population reporting any cooking, heating or lighting, expressed as a percentage. “Clean” is defined by the emission rate targets and specific fuel recommendations (against unprocessed coal and kerosene) included in the normative World Health Organization guidelines for indoor air quality; see the data for household fuel combustion, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-07-01-02.pdf.
Better data collection relating to the green economy and the environmental sector would be valuable for policy-makers in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Asian-Pacific countries. Better data on green and decent jobs is particularly needed to assess the impact of climate change and climate-related policies on social inclusion. Without better data, it will be difficult to determine what policy changes are needed to assure a just transition to environmental sustainability and to monitor progress going forward.