

Sustainable trade: the EU Report Highlights Pressing Need for Further Action by the Bangladeshi Authorities to Improve Labour Conditions in the Garment Sector

The European Commission today released its third annual report on progress achieved in the Bangladeshi garment sector through the Sustainability Compact for Bangladesh – an international response to the 2013 tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza factory complex.

Since the launch of the initiative, the Compact has contributed to tangible improvements in workplace safety. The Compact played also a key role in opening up and supporting a dialogue on working conditions for employees of Bangladeshi garment sector with trade unions, employers, buyers and NGOs.

However, respect of workers' rights remains a challenging area, with a particular urgency as regards freedom of association. While some improvements can be noted, sizeable efforts still need to be made to ensure that real change takes place and is sustained over the long term, according to the today's report.

As regards improvement of legislative nature, the EU expects in particular further development of labour-related legislation and enforcement of the existing rules, in full compliance with the fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, as defined by the International Labour Organisation ('ILO'). Those rights should be granted to all workers without exception, including to those in the export processing zones. The EU draws in particular attention to the need for more effective investigation and prosecution of alleged cases of anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices. Room for improvement also exists as regards registration procedures for new workers' unions, which should ensure expeditious and non-arbitrary processing of applications.

On administrative aspects, the report points at the need for a new strategy for safety inspections and remediation, ensuring effective coordination between key Bangladeshi regulators with competences in that area. The EU also calls for further reinforcement of administrative capacities through recruitment and training of inspectors and for a full transparency as regards the outcomes of factory inspections.

Further to that, the EU report underlines the need for continuous education, training and capacity building on issues such as labour rights, and occupational safety and health.


The report, together with recommendations addressed to the authorities of Bangladesh, also formulates the wish for a strong longer-term engagement of international private companies involved in business operations in Bangladesh, which have been key in bringing progress on the ground over the last years.

Background

The Sustainability Compact launched in July 2013 aims to promote continuous improvements as regards respect of labour rights and factory safety in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. The initiative brings together the European Union, the Government of Bangladesh, the United States, Canada – i.e. the main markets for Bangladeshi garment

production – as well as the ILO. The Compact is based on short and long term commitments related to three inter-linked pillars:

- respect for labour rights;
- structural integrity of buildings and occupational safety and health;
- responsible business conduct.

The annual technical progress report reflects the views of the European Commission, based on information from a number of sources, including the Compact partners, in particular their [latest follow-up meeting](#)  which took place in Dhaka on 28 January 2016, as well as Bangladeshi and international private sector and civil society, including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and Human Rights Watch.