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# Addressing Decent Work in international cooperation

Operationalising the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy's goal *“Contribute to sustainable economic growth, market development and the creation of decent jobs”*

Working paper, taking into account contributions to the e-discussion of the e+i and FCHR networks.

Version 2, June 2021





## About Decent Work

Creating conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all are indispensable to achieve sustainable development, eradicate poverty and leave no one behind by 2030. Aligned with SDG 8<sup>1</sup>, one of the four goals of Switzerland's Strategy for International Cooperation is defined as *"Contribute to sustainable economic growth, market development and the creation of decent jobs"*.<sup>2</sup>

### What is Decent Work?

Decent work remains one of the best routes out of poverty. The concept of decent work has been established by the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** in 1999, describing the goal of decent work as *'not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quality'*. At the base of defining decent work the ILO identified four strategic pillars: (1) job creation, (2) rights at work, (3) social protection and (4) social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, the decent work agenda became integral part of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the SDGs, particularly SDG 8. The political commitment for decent work is anchored in **international human rights law**, set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and subsequent treaties. As signatories to these treaties, Switzerland and its development partner states are legally obliged to respect, protect and fulfil, the right to freely chosen work, to full employment, to fair wages, to an adequate standard of living, to safe and healthy working conditions, to rest and leisure, to form and join trade unions, to strike, and the right to social security.<sup>4</sup>

### How to address Decent Work?

The four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda relate to specific challenges or aspects to be addressed. SDC can thus contribute to quantitative aspects (more jobs), qualitative aspects (higher incomes, better working conditions, social protection) and systemic aspects (improved labour market functioning and thus access to jobs and opportunities).

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<sup>1</sup> "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". For targets and indicators see: [https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8#targets\\_and\\_indicators](https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8#targets_and_indicators)

<sup>2</sup> Refer to: <https://www.fdfa.admin.ch/deza/en/home/strategie-21-24/jobs.html>

<sup>3</sup> Refer to: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> See [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 6 to 9. List of 171 parties](#)



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**SDCs programs and interventions** are already substantially contributing to these aspects, e.g., by fostering the creation of employment opportunities (**more jobs**), raising productivity, incomes and working conditions (**better jobs**) and by improving access to jobs (**inclusive labour markets**). Nevertheless, it is useful to deliberately and systematically think about how such contributions are made or could be enhanced. In general, SDC may contribute to decent work through its programs at:

- > **the macro level** i.e., improved legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks, including social protection frameworks – also for people working in the informal economy
- > **the meso level**, e.g., improvements with respect to labour administration and inspection, at the level of associations with respect to safety and health practises at work, at the level of firms<sup>5</sup> with respect to formalisation, recruitment and promotion practises and at the level of education (inclusion, quality, content)
- > **the micro level**, e.g., at the individual level by improving young people people's or migrants' education (including technical, foundational and transferable skills) and employability

In order that all SDC programming aims to make an explicit contribution to Decent Work and that no one is left behind<sup>6</sup>, the **application of a human rights-based approach** (HRBA) to development cooperation is recommended. Applying a HRBA includes (1) identifying respective rights and duties related to decent work, (2) integrating the human right principles of non-discrimination, inclusive participation, transparency and accountability in programming; (3) strengthening duty-bearers' capacities to meet their human rights obligations and empowering rights-holders to know and claim their rights (e.g., fair wage, safe and healthy working conditions).<sup>7</sup>

### **How to operationalise Decent Work within SDC's programs and interventions?**

The decision on how to operationalise decent work within existing and new programs and interventions can be guided by prioritizing some of the **10 substantive elements for the measurement of decent work** proposed by the ILO<sup>8</sup> (see table below) that could be addressed within the scope of an intervention.

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<sup>5</sup> See also the [UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights](#), also known as 'Ruggie principles'

<sup>6</sup> See [Factsheet Leave no one behind \(LNOB\) and HRBA](#) as well as the [Thematic Working Aids on LNOB](#)

<sup>7</sup> See also [SDC Guidance on Human Rights in Development Cooperation](#), 2019

<sup>8</sup> ILO (2013): [Decent Work Indicators, Guidelines for Producers and Users of Statistical and Legal Framework Indicators](#)



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ILO Decent Work Agenda	Decent Work aspects addressed	Substantive Elements for the measurement of Decent Work (ILO suggestion)
Employment creation	> <b>more</b> jobs (quantitative aspects)	1) employment opportunities
Rights at work	> <b>better</b> jobs: higher incomes, better working conditions (qualitative aspects)	2) adequate earnings and productive work 3) decent working time 4) combining work, family and personal life 5) work that should be abolished 6) stability and security of work 7) equal opportunity & treatment on the job 8) safe work environment
Social protection	> <b>inclusive</b> labour market functioning and access to jobs (systemic aspects)	9) social security
Social dialogue		10) social dialogue, employers' and workers' representation

When operationalising, **decent work should not be seen like a dichotomy, but rather as a spectrum, or as a pathway** towards reducing decent work deficits. Thus, rather than aspiring for the 'ultimate decent job' we should consider specific decent work deficits to reduce in order to set people on this pathway towards decent work. This includes approaches to improve working conditions and social protection in the informal economy, where a large part of our target groups find employment, and which will not disappear any time soon.

It is highly likely that in a given system multiple decent work aspects need to be addressed and it is almost impossible for an intervention to tackle all of them at the same time, though many are interdependent. As a consequence, programs and interventions should **prioritize the most relevant substantive elements** for decent work in a particular context, based on the actual needs assessed, as well as the expected intended and unintended impact, with a view of achieving progressively the rights recognized. The prioritized elements need to be precisely defined, reflected in the project's Theory of Change and Log Frame, and feasible to monitor.



## How to monitor and report on Decent Work in SDC?

Systematically monitoring the effects of programs and intervention on the addressed substantive elements of decent work will be crucial in order to a) maximise the impact of SDC on decent work, and b) improve its reporting on the International Cooperation Strategy's objectives towards the parliament and the broader public.

SDC programs regularly report on standardized Aggregated and Thematic Reference Indicators (ARIs and TRIs). Particularly relevant in this case are the following indicators (although additional ARI / TRI may be relevant depending on a project's context, e.g., when it comes to left behind groups, education for decent work, gender equality at work and the reduction of unpaid domestic and care work, etc.):

- > **IED ARI 2 Numbers of persons having new or better employment:** This indicator measures new employment situations (formal or informal, including self-employment) and better employment (higher incomes, reduced vulnerability, security in the workplace, social protection).
  - > Please consider **MIG ARI 1 Access to safe and decent work opportunities** and **MIG TRI 1 New or better employment in the country of destination or origin** if your program is mainly addressing migrants and forcibly displaced persons.
- > **IED TRI 1 Change in yearly net income:** This indicator measures changes in the available incomes of beneficiaries (in the formal or informal sector, including self-employment and employment in subsistence agriculture).
- > **POV TRI 2 Social Protection:** This indicator measures the proportion of population protected in at least one social protection area.

While the IED and MIG indicators are measured at the level of individual beneficiaries having improved their employment and/or income situation as a result of the project intervention, the POV indicator goes beyond individual beneficiaries. SECO uses similar indicators and developed a note on how to use them related to decent work.<sup>9</sup>

Depending on the substantive elements chosen, **additional context specific indicators** defined at intervention level may be needed.<sup>10</sup> When selecting indicators and defining a baseline, it is important to refer to the realities experienced by workers in the respective sectors, not just the formal rules (e.g., legislation in place).

<sup>9</sup> Refer to: ILO (2020): Measuring Job Quality in Trade Promotion and Private Sector Development Projects.

<sup>10</sup> The SDG indicators (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>) can be helpful in this regard – or the ILO's SME Performance Measurement Toolkit (<https://www.sme-measurement.org>) when it comes to PSD.



## Selected project examples (as presented during the e-discussion)

### Migration

*Migrant workers, in order to gain access to better jobs, not only need to possess relevant skills, but also be able to signal and validate these skills to potential employers. In migration projects in countries of origin, decent work can often only be indirectly promoted, , with limited outreach to the destination countries.*

The “**Poverty Reduction through Safe Migration, Skills Development and Enhanced Job Placement**” (PROMISE) project in the Mekong region is thus focusing on (i) ethical recruitment of private recruitment agencies, (ii) promoting the rights of migrant workers, including safe migration, (iii) reintegration of returnees to access employment and skills development. The project has established solid partnerships with the private sector (private recruitment agencies and associations and employers) to improve the skills and thus the employability of migrant workers in Thailand.

PROMISE is implemented by the International Organisation for Migration. [Read more](#)

### Private sector development

*Decent Work principles/values can be incorporated in PSD by demonstrating and making a business case for promoting decent work, encouraging gradual formalization and income generation. The challenge is going from successful pilots to systemic change, where other market players respond to these changes. Joining forces with labour unions by strengthening their capacity to advocate for decent work and improved social protection could be an interesting approach.*

The “**Alliances Caucasus Programme**” (ALCP) on market systems development for agricultural products, initially didn't have a specific focus on decent work. However, they found that the quality of work in the dairy sector had significantly improved within the context of an improved food safety regulatory environment and increased demand for dairy products. Farmers' income stability and security increased due to contracts between farmers and enterprises and relatively well-paid jobs were created in dairy enterprises providing equal pay for women and men.

ALCP is implemented by Mercy Corps. [Read more](#)



## Vocational skills development

*In VSD projects decent work is mainly addressed by improving the occupational and soft skills of people employed in the informal economy (including domestic workers) through non-formal education programmes, including elements of basic education. Sensitising learners and their prospective employer about labour rights and addressing social protection issues through policy dialogue can be important complementing elements.*

The “**Skills Development Programme**” in **Cambodia** targets disadvantaged young women and men and low-skilled workers and aims for better access to decent employment opportunities and increased income. In its monitoring, the project measures key substances of the decent work, such as the number of graduates having a formal employment contract, gainful employment, and increased income.

SDP is implemented by Swisscontact and INBAS. [Read more](#)

## Advocacy and labour rights

*Swiss NGO projects, co-financed through SDC programme contributions, often address Decent Work in a very direct way, for example through the promotion of social dialogue between workers, employers and public authorities, advocating for the respect of labour rights or empowering right holders. Here is just one inspiring example:*

In Bolivia, Solidar Suisse is **working together with local trade union federations** to help precariously employed sugar cane cutters and domestic workers. In training programs, trade unionists learn about the applicable laws and ways to enforce their rights. This knowledge is imparted at events, with the help of brochures or via radio programs. The unions lobby for better working conditions in negotiations with employers and in dialog with the state authorities. For example, the sugar cane cutters have been able to conclude agreements with companies to increase piecework wages and to obtain better health care and school access for their children from the municipalities.

[Solidar Suisse](#) and [Brücke – Le pont](#) together form the Decent Work Alliance, supported through SDC programme contributions.



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## Recommended further readings

BEAMexchange (2020): [Should we create decent work or make work more decent?](#)

ILO website [Decent work](#)

ILO (1998): [ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#)

ILO (2019): [A Systemic Approach to Creating More and Better Jobs](#)

ILO (2020): [Value Chain Development for Decent Work](#) ([English](#)) ([French](#)) ([Spanish](#))

ILO (2020): [Measuring Job Quality in Trade Promotion and Private Sector Development Projects. A 'how to' note developed for SECO WE](#) (link only accessible from within the Federal Administration)

SECO (2021): Cooperation agreement between ILO and the Swiss Confederation ([English](#)) ([French](#))

SDC (2021): [e-discussion threads](#) (Decent Work e-discussion of May 2021)

UN CESCR (2005): [General Comment No. 18: The Right to Work](#)

UN CESCR (2016): [General Comment No. 23 on the Right to Just and Favorable conditions of work](#)

### Document details

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#### Authors

SDC IED expert team and its backstopping mandate, incorporating very helpful contributions and comments by colleagues from different SDC focal points and expert contributions made during the Decent Work e-discussion of the e+i and FCHR networks in May 2021

#### This document is also available at

[www.shareweb.ch/site/ei](http://www.shareweb.ch/site/ei) > e+i How to > Decent Work