ILO forms partnership with the São Paulo textile sector to promote decent work

New initiative will focus on improvement in working conditions and management of sewing shops in São Paulo (SP).

São Paulo, May 4, 2017 – Today, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Brazilian Association of Textile Retail (ABVTEX), Brazilian Association of Textile Industry (Abit), Instituto C&A (the Brazilian office of C&A Foundation), Instituto Lojas Renner and Zara Brazil announced a partnership to promote decent work in the textile and apparel sector of São Paulo.

The partners will engage in the initiative “Improving working conditions and management capabilities of sewing shops in São Paulo”. With a three-pronged approach, the initiative will: raise rights awareness and empower populations vulnerable that work in sewing shops, raise risks awareness and do management training for sewing shop owners (especially micro, small and medium enterprises), and build the capacities of institutions at federal, state and local levels for to develop and implement policies to improve working conditions in sewing shops, especially focusing on migrant male and female workers.

The interventions should help transform the management structure of the textile and apparel supply chain, stressing the strategic importance for companies to prevent risks that arise from the exploitation of labour of vulnerable populations, such as migrants, women and children living in poverty. Over the past years in Brazil, more and more emphasis has been placed on dealing with these issues given the arrival of a growing number of migrants from other Latin American countries and African countries.

Besides labour exploitation, the lack of proper occupational safety and health conditions is also a serious problem in irregular and informal sewing shops. Brazil has the fifth largest textile industry in the world, employing millions of people and generating profit to thousands of companies. Like in all industries, such risks exist and require specific actions to be mitigated, both as part of a business strategy and to promote human and labour rights.

“This new ILO partnership with the fashion industry and retail sector in Brazil will help the country to promote socially and economically sustainable supply chains, offering decent work to workers of the sector”, said Peter Poschen, Director of the ILO Office in Brazil, during the ceremony in which the partnership was formalized today in São Paulo.

Edmundo Lima, Executive Director of ABVTEX, said that this major initiative aimed at decent work in the fashion production chain has as a distinguishing feature – besides joint efforts for sustainability in the fashion industry and retail sector – the critical technical and institutional support of ILO to improve management of sewing shops in the State of São Paulo and, consequently, improve working conditions in the sector. “The dialogue among the parties to this agreement is consolidated – through this public-private partnership – into concrete actions for the adoption of best practices for responsible supply in the Brazilian textile chain, one of the key activity lines of ABVTEX, who has developed since 2010 a Supplier Monitoring Programme with this goal,” said Lima.

Fernando Pimentel, Executive Director of Abit, said that “Abit has partnered with several national and international organisations and institutions to counter this practice of human exploitation in our production and distribution chain, which is unacceptable for the damage it causes to the people subject to this situation.” In his opinion, it is a complex landscape, with regional and also international reach, that requires co-ordinated actions of public and private agents for the problem to be eliminated at a global level.
“That is why we have said that, if the market is global, forms of production should also be increasingly globalized, with standards to be followed by all countries and producers. Unfair competition and the lack of common rules lead to a form of production that is inconceivable for human dignity,” added Abit’s Executive Director.

Formalized in 1999, the concept of Decent Work summarizes ILO’s historic mission of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

Press Contact:

Ana Paula Canestrelli
Communications and Public Information Officer
Oficial de Comunicação e Informação Pública
ILO Brazilian office
Phone: +55 61 2106 4625 / E-mail: canestrelli@ilo.org