

July 2021

# Newsletter

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## Dear Friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had major impacts on the world, and Jordan is no exception. The country has struggled to cope with adversities, reporting in March around 9,000 infections and dozens of deaths nationwide, according to government figures.

The national estimate of unemployment for Jordanians in the first quarter of 2021 was 25.0 per cent (males 24.2 per cent, females 28.5 females), compared to 19.3 percent in the first quarter of 2020.

The pandemic has hit the country's garment industry, exposing some weaknesses in terms of compliance and provision of decent working conditions.

Government restrictions, including closures and reduced hours of work, have taken a toll on workers. Migrant workers have had to fight fears for their own personal safety and that of their families at home, especially in countries worst affected by COVID-19, such as India.

Nevertheless, the sector has shown resilience, with a full rebound expected by the end of 2021, thanks to the swiftness, thoroughness, and collaboration with which tripartite stakeholders and brands dealt with these challenges.

With the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination of Jordanian and non-Jordanian workers, the industry is moving in the right direction.

Better Work Jordan (BWJ) will continue to support stakeholders in adjusting to the realities of COVID-19, while ensuring recovery for the sector, to guarantee that decent working conditions are prioritised.

The programme is moving into new issue areas, examining the sector more holistically, to address gender-based violence, support worker mental health, and ensure responsible wage digitisation.

Engagement with tripartite partners, capacity building, and joint projects are key to the long-term sustainability of the positive outcomes that BWJ has achieved thus far.



**95**  
Factories



**36**  
Assessment reports



**65,775**  
Workers in registered factories



**192**  
Advisory visits



**1,535**  
Training participants



**21**  
International buyers

*The Better Work Jordan team*



# Annual Report 2021: An Industry and Compliance Review

The 12th Annual Report of the BWJ programme offers an update on the state and progress of the garment industry throughout 2020, assessing how the sector performed under COVID-19.

The garment sector in Jordan has been spared the worst effects of the pandemic and resulting economic downturn, with only a 15 per cent reduction in exports, compared to other garment exporting countries worldwide that saw major contractions of 30 to 50 per cent.

Garment exports in 2020 were valued at USD 1.6 billion and made up to 22 per cent of all exports in Jordan, according to the national Department of Statistics (DOS).

At the same time, COVID-19, which has had a monetary and human impact on Jordan, exposed considerable weaknesses in the industry, increasing instances of non-compliance in some significant areas, such as timeliness of wage payments and cases of coercion.

The BWJ 46th Project Advisory Committee (PAC) met on April 7, 2021 to discuss findings of the report as well as other industry-related issues.

Drawing from multiple data sources over the last year and a half, the annual report also presents data on select non-garment factories working with BWJ.

Addressing worker's needs, BWJ is moving into several thematic areas that go above and beyond traditional views of non-compliance including prevention of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, which has been a long-standing goal of BWJ.

Throughout, BWJ has continued to improve social dialogue as well as workers' mental health.

The programme encourages readers to visit its [website](#) and access the [full report](#) or its [shorter version](#) for detailed findings and observations.

## Compliance cluster

Over than 200 questions to address the below topics on international and national labour regulations

 CHILD LABOUR	 DISCRIMINATION	 FORCED LABOUR	 FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
 COMPENSATION	 CONTRACTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES (HR)	 OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH (OSH)	 WORKING TIME

## COVID-19 update

Through the end of June, 6,866 Covid-19 cases have been reported among employees in Jordan's garment sector across 61 different factories. Of these, 26 are active cases. Currently, four factories are reporting active cases. All workers are now eligible for vaccines (barring any health concerns). As of the end of June, 42,254 garment workers had received vaccinations (at least the first shot) across 62 factories. Larger factories partnered with the Ministry of Health to arrange vaccinations at the factory.

42,254



Vaccinations

6,866



Covid-19 Cases

26



Active Cases



## COVID-19 – country update





## Strengthening workers' voices

The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries in Jordan is formulating a [five-year strategy](#) in the sector to advance the planning and organising capacity of the union, as well as labour rights.

Conducted in partnership with BWJ, the strategy is designed to strengthen union governance and

democracy, enhance mechanisms for communication with workers, advance industrial relations, and secure the union's financial future and equity.

Under union bylaws, the strategy regulates and organise the factory-level work of union committees, as well as the work of migrant workers' committees at the level of Jordan's industrial zones.

**“The strategy propagates and builds on efforts of the union and focuses on providing decent working conditions for workers in the sector.”**

**Union President, Fathalla Al Imrani**

The strategy enhances union mechanisms for monitoring and assessing factories through elected committees, increased union visits, and formulation of bylaws regulating the work of sub-committees of the executive/administrative body that support the duties and tasks of the union president.

The union has recently appointed a spokesperson, as the strategy seeks to increase union visibility through the media and on social media platforms.

Established in 1954, the union initiates collective bargaining with employers' representatives to conclude sectoral agreements providing unified employment contracts. It continues to advocate for decent working conditions, including through negotiating sector-wide [collective bargaining agreements](#).

The union is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the rights and interests of workers in the sector. This applies for both members and non-members of the union.



Identifying mental health as a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed, BWJ has launched an innovative project to improve workers' mental health, particularly women, who form the majority of the sector's labour force and face many physical and psychological stressors.

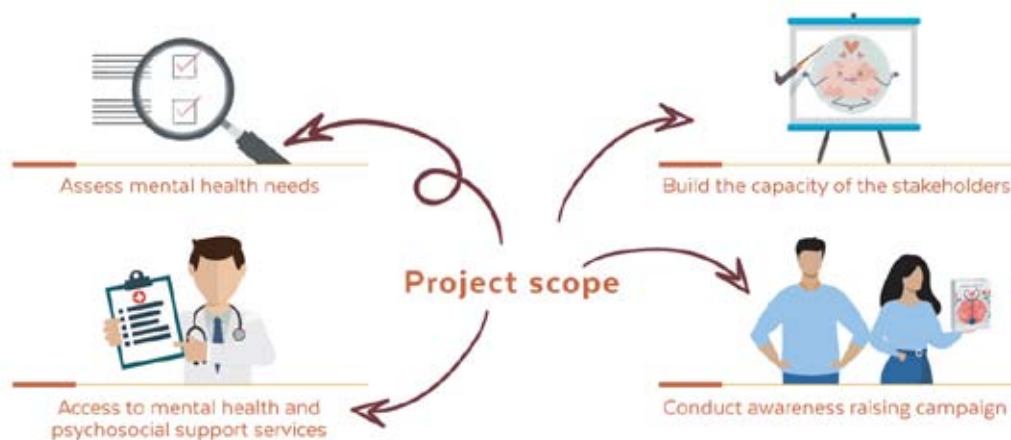
The project seeks to ensure that garment factories have a **mental health** referral system meeting workers' needs for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) services and that workers become more resilient against mental health risks.

BWJ specialists met with industry representatives on June 2, 2021 to discuss the project, whose scope covers sector-wide assessment of mental health needs, stakeholder capacity building, accessibility of MHPSS support services, and awareness-raising



action.

A BWJ **policy brief** surveyed workers and managers in 2020 and found significant issues with well-being among workers



Employees with unresolved mental health problems suffer of 35% reduction in productivity, contributing to a loss to the U.S. economy of \$210.5 billion a year, according to the American Psychiatric Association.

Mental health and psychosocial support for workers can increase productivity, make workers comfortable, boost profits, improve workplace stability, and prevent absenteeism.

Emphasising the need for effective awareness-raising among both workers and managers,

BWJ specialists and the industry representatives agreed that COVID-19 impacts could exacerbate pre-existing mental health difficulties, to which female workers tend to be particularly vulnerable.

Under a **2019 sectoral collective bargaining agreement (CBA)**, garment factories were committed to providing workers with physical and psychological healthcare services, including through referral. Garment factories have agreed to appoint focal points to coordinate with BWJ on implementing mental health project activities.



## Working with tripartite partners

Despite COVID-19 challenges, BWJ was able to swiftly adapt service delivery to virtual modality while expanding to new areas to fulfil the unique needs caused by the pandemic. The overall goal of BWJ remained the same -- to ensure the sustainability of improved working and living conditions of workers through social partners.

BWJ continues to progress in capacity-building activities for the tripartite stakeholders (the government, workers' organizations and employers' organizations) and formalized many of these partnerships through key Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

One key MoU was signed in May 2020 between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Jordanian Ministry of Labour (MoL) establishing a BWJ unit within the MoL. BWJ supports the capacity building of this unit in addition to continued training and the secondment programme for labour inspectors. BWJ specialists and MoL officials from its Inspection Directorate held a coordination meeting on May 30, 2021 to agree on the timeline and technical details of labour inspections under the MoU.

In parallel, BWJ solidifies its relations with workers' and employers' organisations.

The programme has trained workers' union staff

and representatives on several subjects and issues, including sexual harassment prevention, and delivered Training of Trainers (ToT) so that the union can train workers directly and on a larger scale in the future. It has also arranged for bilingual organisers to work with the union and support it in their outreach to migrant workers. The union is working with BWJ on dissemination of multiple-language awareness-raising materials among all workers in the sector. This outreach effort seeks to ensure workers are well-informed of their rights under the Jordanian labour law and international labour standards. It also encourages workers to take the COVID-19 vaccine, and maintain preventive health measures.

At the same time, BWJ engaged with individual factories during the course of COVID-19, primarily through virtual communication, and through deepening its partnership with the Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporter's Association (J-GATE). The association is the main organisation representing garment exporting factory employers in Jordan. It is considered to be the technical arm of the Chamber of Industry for the textile and garment sector. In December, BWJ and J-GATE signed an MoU formalizing their partnership with the goal to promote decent job opportunities, improve sector competitiveness, and strengthen industrial relations between workers and employers.



## Transparent and equitable employment

BWJ was able to develop widespread support for developing and strengthening employment of Jordanians, including fresh university graduates. The focus so far has been on middle management positions and strengthening Jordanian presence in these positions.

The Jordanian garment industry is dominated by migrant workers, but the government seeks to increase Jordanian employment in the sector. However, there is a skill mismatch between the jobs available and the educational background of the majority of Jordanians. While many Jordanians work in basic jobs in the factory such as sewing operator and helper, the educational profile of these workers goes beyond these basic jobs. Improving the pathways to middle management jobs – either from within the factory or from outside – can improve the matching of workers to employment opportunities.

A consulting firm worked with relevant stakeholders to develop job descriptions for middle management

positions in the garment sector. Not only will this make it easier for Jordanians to learn about and apply for relevant jobs, research has shown that an increased transparency in the hiring process can lead to more applications and successful placements for female job candidates. Key stakeholders met in January 2021 to review the initial report and give input for future development.

The study focused on developing job descriptions for the functions of accounting and finance; human resources and administration; information technology; compliance, health and safety; logistics and sourcing; pattern preparation; laying and cutting; printing and embroidery; sewing; quality control; ironing and packaging; and sales and marketing.

It analysed job families within each function, and developed career paths, identifying all possible career progression steps, based on the required education level, languages, experience, competencies, and training.



Better Work Jordan (BWJ) is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The ILO flagship programme brings together stakeholders from all levels of the global garment manufacturing industry to improve working conditions, enhance respect for labour rights, and boost competitiveness. BWJ began operations at the request of the governments of Jordan and the United States over ten years ago. Better Work country programmes regularly prepare public reports synthesising industry updates and highlighting non-compliance findings and trends in order to increase transparency and to communicate observations to a wider audience. For more information and updates, visit the website of [Better Work Jordan](#).

Better Work Jordan is supported by the following key donor partners

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This project is co-funded by  
the European Union



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Better Work Jordan receives financial support from the Labour Program of Employment and Social Development Canada, the European Union, the Jordanian Ministry of Labour and the United States Department of Labor. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Better Work Jordan and do not necessarily reflect the views of these donors.

The funding that is provided by the United States Department of Labor falls under cooperative agreement number IL-21187-10-75-K. 43 percentage of the total costs of the program in 2020 was financed with Federal funds, for a total of 679,792 dollars. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government. This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of Better Work Jordan and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.