



**BetterWork**  
Bangladesh

## Annual Report

**Broadening Gender  
Equality and Beyond**



International  
Labour  
Organization



**IFC**

International  
Finance Corporation  
WORLD BANK GROUP

2019 DATA

## An innovative report to inspire concrete change

Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) is launching this Annual Report at a challenging time for the country, particularly the garment sector which is currently witnessing unprecedented disruptions as a result of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The second edition of our Annual Report not only highlights factories' assessment results, it also showcases the programmes' key initiatives, partnerships, achievements and challenges from the past year. It draws attention to Better Work Bangladesh's efforts to empower female workers in the industry to take on roles with confidence, and also includes information on

the programme's COVID-19 responses. Readers can access the report online, to view more detailed findings and observations from 174 factory assessments completed in 2019.

Better Work Bangladesh, which is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), has created a strong presence in the country over the last five years and hopes to further drive sustainability. The continued support from our partner organisations and brands has propelled us to work towards a common goal of growth and productivity.



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The digital version of the Annual Report can be found on our website: <https://annual-report.betterwork.org/2019>

## Growing our presence through partnerships

Better Work Bangladesh rolled out its in-factory services in 2015 and has been working with national and international stakeholders including donor governments, unions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) ever since. The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is one of the country's most important sectors, constituting around 84% of overall exports, playing a major role in employment creation, poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women. Better Work Bangladesh has proven to be a key development partner by improving compliance on legal requirements and enhancing business outcomes. We seek to reinforce partnerships with the government and social partners to leverage collaboration which can in turn improve occupational safety and health (OSH) indicators, help enforce OSH regulations and build capacity to oversee industrial safety. To respond to COVID-19, our team has been redeployed to offer support to factories and workers on crucial health and safety and industrial relations issues, to coordinate information campaigns and training sessions for national partners, to provide policy advice, and to help bring all stakeholders together to develop responses at national and international level.

### OUR PROGRESS

- ◆ Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR) initiative trained 106 female workers, 79 are now in supervisory roles, earning 39% more on average.
- ◆ Mothers@Work, aimed at strengthening maternity rights for young working mothers, expanded to 80 factories in 2019.
- ◆ With ILO, we launched a three-year initiative in partnership with Gap Inc. to strengthen social dialogue in their supplier factories.

## 4 COUNTRY OVERVIEW

Our primary focus in 2019 was gender equality. We rolled out specific interventions to address gender-based violence and the barriers to equal opportunities in the workplace.

## 6 HOW WE WORK

In addition to the 1,136 advisory visits, 174 assessments and 127 training sessions delivered in 2019, we worked with partner brands and institutions to build capacity, strengthen social dialogue and improve industrial relations.

## 8 OUR STRATEGY

Better Work Bangladesh's strategic objectives for 2018-2021 has the long-term goal of improving working conditions and competitiveness, boosting sustainable development and empowering women.

## 10 NON-COMPLIANCE FINDINGS

The highlights from the eight different areas either focus on areas where non-compliance is very low or has improved from previous years or in areas where non-compliance is high or has regressed.

## 11 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2019, 66 Participation Committees (PCs) were formed and improvements were made on OSH issues and transparency on payroll records improved.

## 14 TACKLING CHALLENGES

Better Work Bangladesh is working on specific interventions to address persistent and critical issues in relation to OSH, compensation and contracts and Human Resources (HR).

## 16 SPOTLIGHT

A closer look at our programme's commitment on increasing opportunities for female workers to fulfil their potential through building an environment to encourage them to participate and progress at work.

## 18 THE WAY FORWARD

Collaborations and joint initiatives with partners and brands in 2020 will lead the way in driving sustainable change and addressing new challenges faced by the industry as a result of COVID-19.

# Bangladesh

Better Work Bangladesh is working to shape the garment sector's future development using practical, tried-and-tested methods to address persistent challenges that threaten to limit the industry – and the country's – potential and reputation. While the assessments found improvements in many areas in relation to compensation, social dialogue, industrial relations and OSH, there is also further room for improvement in these areas. Information on interventions and partnerships to accelerate better compliance rates in factories are included in the next sections.



### ACHIEVEMENTS

- 70%** of factories assessed now have a functioning Participation Committee (PC), which is one of the foundations of our work.
- 82%** of female sewing machine operators were promoted to supervisory roles in our factories as a result of the GEAR programme.
- 30** participants from 14 factories joined the 'FACTORY AMBASSADORS' initiative launched by Better Work Bangladesh to train factory compliance staff on greater ownership over long-term factory improvements, based on the programme's enterprise advisors and training officer roles.
- 54%** decrease on maintaining more than one accurate payroll record among the 69 factories that are with us for more than 3 years.
 

<b>79.7%</b>	<b>56.5%</b>	<b>36.2%</b>
CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3

### CHALLENGES

- 50%** of factories assessed followed disciplinary measures which did not comply with legal requirements.
- 85%** of factories were non-compliant with the requirement for a functional Safety Committee.
- 54%** of employers did not provide adequate maternity leave.

**“Six years into our existence, the Better Work programme is having a significant and long-lasting impact on Bangladesh’s garment industry. We aim to support continuous improvement by working with our partners to create sustainable ownership of compliance and ensure improved working conditions.”**

Anne-Laure Henry-Gréard, Better Work Bangladesh Programme Manager

# HOW WE WORK



## The three-level approach

Our work goes far beyond factory assessments. It not only comprises initiatives at the global level that invite international stakeholders and brands to tackle on-the-ground problems, but also addresses country-level issues through partnerships with government organisations, unions and employer associations.

 <h3>GLOBAL REACH</h3> <p>We act as a global resource for data-driven information and strategies for improving labour conditions and enhancing productivity. The ILO, IFC and the World Bank (WBG) leverage their partnership through Better Work to <b>collaborate on public policy and technical interventions</b> for better work outcomes.</p>	 <h3>COUNTRY LEVEL</h3> <p>We work with national constituents to build capacity, influence labour laws, and strengthen industrial relations. Our efforts <b>improve competitiveness and strengthen the private sector</b>, with benefits for factories performing well. We work with local institutions and social partners for stronger workplace compliance.</p>	 <h3>FACTORY STRATEGY</h3> <p>We offer hands-on assistance to promote worker-management cooperation. Training, advisory services and practical tools help managers and workers <b>increase their ownership of labour law compliance</b> and self-diagnose and fix problems themselves. Currently, 241 factories are enrolled in our programme.</p>
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## OUR CHECKLIST

We evaluate over 200 questions or issues on the eight topics below on international (red) and national (yellow) labour regulations.

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

# HOW WE WORK

## COUNTRY LEVEL INITIATIVES IN 2019

 <h3>RESEARCH</h3> <p>Better Work Bangladesh released a progress brief of its independent impact assessment report based on two rounds of data collected from 47 Better Work factories in 2015 and in 2018, analysing our programme's impact on working conditions, workers' well-being and firm performance in these three years.</p>	 <h3>SPECIAL PROJECTS</h3> <p>Along with ILO's SDIR project, we launched a three-year initiative in partnership with Gap Inc. in 2019, where 144 participants from 120 factories received training on grievance mechanisms, international labour standards and the Bangladesh Labour Act to help address challenges in industrial relations faced by both workers and employers.</p>	 <h3>INTERVENTIONS</h3> <p>Tailor-made interventions were developed and delivered to mitigate and address sexual harassment and gender-based violence; to oversee OSH issues. Advisory interventions have taken place in factories with poor grievance mechanisms and HR systems, and high rates of non-compliance around disciplinary procedures.</p>
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## STEPS TO SUPPORT FACTORIES' ACTIVITIES IN 2019

 <h3>ADVISORY SERVICES</h3> <p>There were 1,136 advisory visits conducted throughout 2019 with the aim of increasing compliance with national and international labour standards in the Better Work factories. Since the start of our programme, we have carried out 3,422 advisory visits in total.</p>	 <h3>ASSESSMENTS</h3> <p>In 2019, 174 assessment reports were organised, bringing the total number to 534 from the programme's inception to December 2019. A synthesis report of the assessments carried out between June 2015 and December 2018 was published in September 2019.</p>	 <h3>TRAINING</h3> <p>Better Work Bangladesh conducted 127 training programmes in 2019, which included 24 sessions on preventing sexual harassment. New training programmes were developed to target specific OSH issues, HR management systems and productivity.</p>
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## COVID-19 RESPONSE

As the country faces serious livelihood and economic concerns due to reduced and cancelled export orders, problems on job losses and the future of the sector are emerging. We are committed to supporting through and after this crisis.

**Country level assistance.** We have developed a set of guidelines to help employers, workers and committee members to maintain safe and healthy workplaces. We are also working with factories and stakeholders on legal guidance and best practices to respond to unexpected legal and compliance questions and challenges from the pandemic.

**Response in factories.** Delivery of essential information to ensure payment, decent working conditions, and worker's health. Virtual advisory sessions are being conducted on awareness, and guidance for management and in-house doctors.

## Better Work Bangladesh Strategy 2018-2021

Better Work Bangladesh has defined its priorities for Phase II of its Strategic Vision (2018-2021) to ensure sustainable growth and profitability for the garment industry, improve non-compliance, and create a safe environment for male and female workers.

### INDUSTRY UPDATE

#### Bangladesh to become middle-income country

The RMG industry in Bangladesh has grown exponentially over the past four decades, and much of the country's positive economic and social developments are directly linked to the garment industry. The growth emerged at a time when Bangladesh was seeking to begin a new phase of economic development given its limited natural and industrial resources. But as the nation begins to graduate towards Middle-Income Country status (MIC), it may lose the European Union (EU) trade preference awarded to low-income countries. In the transition period, its position as a low-labour cost country is also likely to shift. Developing high-quality products and technologies, while establishing strategic partnerships with brands to spur on investment across the sector will be essential to survive the economic shocks of COVID-19. Better Work Bangladesh works with local and international brands to support and encourage long-term workplace improvements which not only enhance productivity, but also support Bangladesh's reputation as an ethical sourcing destination.

#### SECOND LARGEST APPAREL EXPORTER (in US\$ billions)



\*This target was established before the onset of COVID-19

Bangladesh is the second largest apparel-exporting country in the world, behind China. The industry employs 4 million people; 54% are women, and contributes more than 13% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

### GOALS

DELIVER SERVICES THAT IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS AND BOOST COMPETITIVENESS IN 400 FACTORIES BY 2021



PROTECTS WORKERS' RIGHTS AND SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECTOR



EMPOWER FEMALE WORKERS AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE SECTOR



### OUR APPROACH

- ◆ Strengthen our collaboration with partners including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), government agencies, brands and workers' organisations.
- ◆ Engage with local manufacturing groups that cover multiple factories so that a strategy can be developed to work in groups. This will increase the impact of social compliance by supporting them to develop the skills and capacity to replicate our approach.
- ◆ Promote transparency in the garment industry by publishing our first synthesis report of social compliance issues in 2019 and setting up a Transparency Portal in 2020. Better Work views greater transparency as an essential stepping-stone toward improved social compliance, as happens in other countries.
- ◆ Produce more communication materials that highlight the programme's impact, disseminated through traditional and social media channels and via partners and stakeholders. They will showcase good practices and success stories from our factories as well as public campaigns and outreach activities.

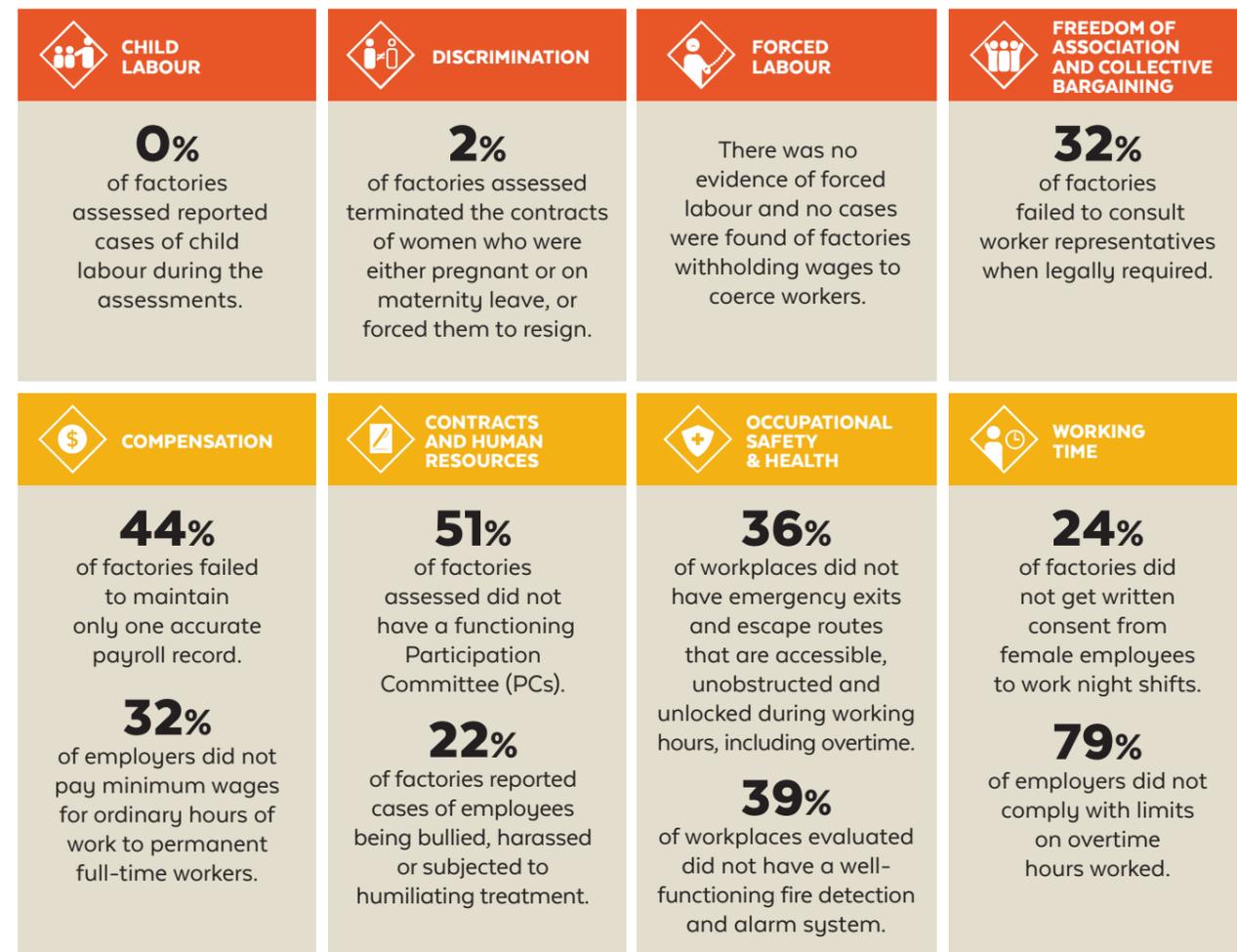
- ◆ Achieve maximum impact through closer cooperation and new areas of partnership with other ILO programmes and government agencies that monitor social compliance and OSH standards in the sector.
- ◆ Strengthen collaboration with employers' and workers' organisations to improve working conditions, promote transparency, freedom of association, collective bargaining and worker-management dialogue across the sector, as well as supporting their capacity building towards monitoring and enforcing compliance.
- ◆ Work with industry stakeholders to help improve perceptions of the Bangladesh garment sector by highlighting progress to-date, particularly in our factories.
- ◆ Work with the Bangladesh government, social partners, brands and others actors to promote joint responsibility and purchasing practices that support decent working conditions and fair wages, under the framework of the Bangladesh Sustainability Compact.

- ◆ Push to eliminate violence in the workplace through training and raising awareness, in line with the ILO Convention 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, which introduced new protection measures to create a safer working environment for women and men.
- ◆ Continue to provide sexual harassment prevention training to curb sexual abuse in the workplace and improve the confidence of female workers. Better Work Bangladesh is exploring opportunities to create new or ensuring existing partnerships with like-minded service providers;
- ◆ Scale-up the GEAR programme piloted with the IFC to train more women to take on supervisory roles in garment factories.
- ◆ Expand the successful Mothers@Work programme, implemented in partnership with UNICEF, to provide paid maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks, medical benefits and day care provision in garment factories, which enables factories to retain skilled female workers.

# NON-COMPLIANCE FINDINGS

## Main results from our assessments

174 out of 241 Better Work-registered factories in Bangladesh were assessed in 2019 on roughly 200 compliance issues. While it is important to take note of achievements, reporting violations is essential. The non-compliance rates in some clusters like OSH, which includes worker protection, and chemical and hazardous substance usage persist. It is important to note that issues such as sexual harassment and freedom of association are difficult to assess and verify independently. Compiling enough evidence to determine violations can be challenging due to the sensitive nature of the issues and the reluctance of workers to report such incidences.



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## New initiatives that are bringing greater impact

174 new initiatives in 2019 have contributed to improving compliance rates and also led to progress with electing PCs, paying agreed wages on time, reducing excessive overtime and increasing the transparency of keeping records of working hours. Analysing the results of ten factories that have completed at least four cycles with Better Work Bangladesh, positive trends emerge as factories deepen their engagement with the programme and are starting to show promising results.

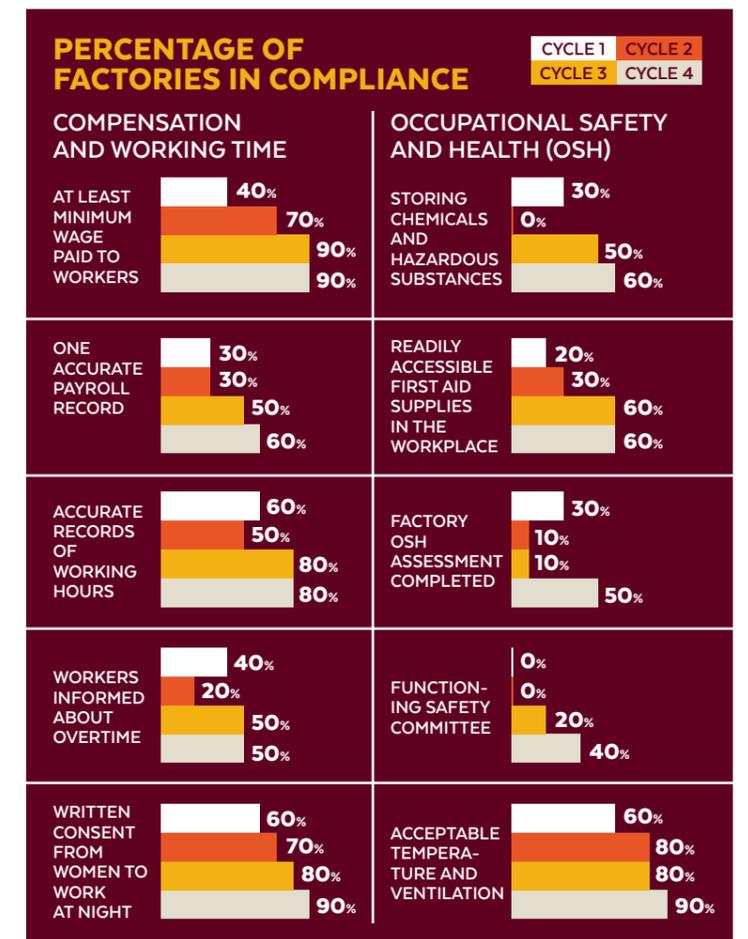


## CONTRACTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

### Factories enrolled for longer periods show greater progress

The preliminary results of the programme indicate that Better Work Bangladesh is contributing to improvements in working conditions

As per the evaluation of 10 factories, by the end of the fourth cycle, there was a 70% increase in factories which had a functioning PC. Compliance with minimum wage payment doubled from cycle 1 to 4. There were also higher rates of compliance with rules on overtime payments, wage information and record-keeping. The average working day decreased from 9.14 to 8.83 hours. Factories enrolled on the programme improved inventory-keeping practices and storing chemical and hazardous substances. 90% of them now have acceptable temperatures and ventilation systems in place.



The compliance assessment data is from ten Better Work Bangladesh factories that have completed at least four years with Better Work or four cycles.

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## ON THE GROUND BENEFITS



**“Since the launch of Better Work in our factory, workers have started to engage more in open discussions with management. I’ve seen a transformation in the worker-management relationships over the past four years. This helped narrow the communication gap within the factory. It also helped us communicate our demands more clearly.”**

**Ayesha Akhter Nazma**, a trimming operator who has been working in SQ Celsius Ltd. for the past nine years

**“The factory management recently introduced service benefits for the workers. It has been our long-cherished dream and I would say it was the biggest success of our PC.”**

**Tania Islam**, operator and PC member, Chorka Textile Ltd.

### Workers are making their voices heard

66 Participation Committees were established in 2019 across Better Work Bangladesh-registered factories

To strengthen social dialogue in factories, Better Work Bangladesh provides technical assistance on the organisation of PC elections. It is a top priority for the programme to work with workers and management to transparently elect and strengthen these committees within factories. Better Work also works with trade unions to strengthen dialogue between employers and trade union representatives.

From the start of the programme until the end of 2019, we facilitated the formation of 171 PCs, of which 66 were established in 2019. As per the Bangladesh Labour Act, factories employing 50 or

more workers must form a PC with an equal balance of worker and employer representatives. During assessments, we check the formation and existence of these PCs, that they are functioning appropriately by reviewing their election committee nomination processes, the elections themselves, and the roles and responsibilities of leaders and members. If any of these processes do not conform to requirements, the factory is non-compliant. Better Work Bangladesh conducted a series of training sessions and seminars at the SQ Celsius Ltd. which boosted worker-management relations.



## Joint initiatives for OSH improvement

Factories that are with us up to four years showed better compliance rates

Better Work Bangladesh has given particular focus to strengthening the OSH capacity of its staff. An external OSH expert has supported Better Work Bangladesh’s ongoing learning needs, as well as evaluating internal OSH capacity via quality assurance and data analysis. The expert also delivered targeted training sessions, including mediation skills for our staff.

We continued to collaborate with factories such as Sparrow Apparels Ltd. and Tunic Apparels Ltd. to organise discussions and training sessions for workers, safety committee members and factory officials, focused on OSH improvements and how to sustain progress in their respective factories.

Although overall compliance with guidelines regarding chemicals and hazardous substances remains an industry challenge, Better Work Bangladesh factories in cycle 3 or 4 saw improvements in 2019 in almost every aspect of the guidelines, particularly in relation to:

- ◆ The proper storage of chemicals and hazardous substances, which decreased from 75% to 41% non-compliance over 3 cycles;
- ◆ Keeping an inventory of chemicals and hazardous substances used in the workplace, which decreased from 75.4% to 42% non-compliance over 3 cycles.

**“People kept telling us that our training was not really changing behaviour. The Training of Trainer (ToT) with Better Work helped me understand what went wrong in how we conducted our training. This is the time to amend the mistakes and make things better.”**

**Sohely Sarfin Mita**, a Compliance Manager who facilitates training for mid-level staff almost every week

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS

CYCLE 1  
CYCLE 2  
CYCLE 3

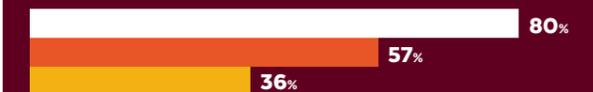
### COMPENSATION

**Decline in ‘double books’.**

Better Work Bangladesh focuses on promoting transparency in factories and encourages brands to do the same as maintaining ‘double books’ or multiple payrolls, whilst not uncommon in the industry, is an unfair practice.

**36%**

is the proportion of cycle 3 factories failing to keep a single accurate payroll record, declining from 80% in cycle 1.

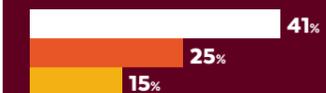


### WORKING TIME

**Regular hours.** The number of factories non-compliant with requirements to ensure working records reflect the hours actually worked has decreased from 41% in cycle 1 to 14% in cycle 3.

**21%**

of factories’ working time records did not reflect the hours actually worked.



**Overtime.** Despite high non-compliance rates, factories which have been with the Better Work programme for longer have shown slight improvements. The non-compliance rate has decreased from 96% in cycle one to 87% in cycle 3.

**79%**

of employers do not comply with limits on overtime hours worked.



## Addressing verbal and gender abuses

High non-compliance rates in relation to rules governing health services and first aid and worker protection pose an ongoing threat to workers' rights. Better Work Bangladesh will accelerate its efforts to address these issues, including maternity rights in the country.



**SOCIAL DIALOGUE**

## Harassment is a cause for concern

**Supervisors were ill-prepared to manage teams, resulting in bullying**

In almost a quarter of the factories assessed, employees said they had faced harassment at work. Most of the cases were found to stem from the behaviour of supervisors, who used abusive language and humiliated workers. This is a common issue in garment factories which can be hectic places to work. Promoted from worker to supervisors from one day to the next, many are thrown into their roles with minimal training, making them ill prepared to manage their teams. We place emphasis on delivering supervisory skills training to factories, specially designed for production managers and supervisors who oversee the workforce. Independent research has found that where supervisors are trained by Better Work, production lines are as much as 22% more productive, as workers reach production targets more quickly. This training gives supervisors the tools they need to transform the workplace through improved supervision of and communication with workers.

**50%** of factories' disciplinary measures were found to be non-compliant with legal requirements.

**27%** of them did not comply with legal requirements for employers to solve grievances/disputes.



**OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH**

**81%**

**of factories assessed did not have a functional SAFETY COMMITTEE**

**This can lead to boiler safety problems and less records of the drills**

Common issues in the emergency preparedness category were that despite the factories carrying out the required drills, there were no designated assembly points, no involvement of the health and safety committees and no records of the drills. Other shortcomings included: factories not conducting drills every six months; the committees not conducting regular meetings; and members unaware of their roles and responsibilities or not trained on OSH issues. Boiler safety is one of the primary concerns for workers. Boilers are a high risk to safety if not maintained properly as they contain explosive substances. In October 2019, we organised an industry seminar on promoting boiler safety, with nearly 50 participants of our partner factories and service provider organisations as well as the Deputy Chief Inspector of Boilers, Engineer Md. Ziaul Hoque.

**25%** of the electrical wires, cables, switches, plugs and equipment boilers were not installed properly

**21%** of boilers were not registered or certified as legally required

**23%** of the boiler operators and technicians did not have the legally required license



## GROUND REPORT

### Breastfeeding and maternity protection

The Mothers@Work\* programme expanded to 80 factories over the course of 2019.

There still appears to be a lack of understanding from employers and workers about legal maternity rights and benefits, as reflected in the non-compliance rates below for the factories assessed in 2019:

- ◆ 35% of employers were non-compliant with requirements to pay workers on time and correctly when they take maternity leave;
- ◆ 54% of employers were non-compliant with requirements to provide;
- ◆ 67% of the workplaces accessed were non-compliant with the need to provide adequate day care facilities.

The Mothers@Work programme, developed in partnership with UNICEF to establish new medical clinics and childcare facilities across our affiliated factories, has encouraged them to make time and space available for mothers to breastfeed. The programme involved the implementation of seven minimum standards which address the challenges faced by young mothers. These standards are:

1. Paid maternity leave;
2. Provision of breastfeeding and childcare facilities;
3. Flexible working arrangements;
4. Health protection;
5. Medical benefits;
6. Employment protection;
7. Non-discrimination.

Tania Akhter is one of the breastfeeding mothers employed at Sparrow Apparels Ltd. in Gazipur, on the outskirts of capital Dhaka. The 28-year-old Quality Inspector is a mother of two and has



**"I can take care of my son, and I can feed him properly. Keeping my son closer to me even in the workplace and knowing that he is safe and growing up healthy gives me peace of mind. This helps me to concrete on my work better."**

*Tania Akhter, one of the breastfeeding mothers*

been bringing her nine-month-old son to the on-site childcare centre and breastfeeding room since her return from maternity leave.

"I can take care of my son, and I can feed him properly. Keeping my son closer to me even in the workplace and knowing that he is safe and growing up healthy gives me peace of mind. This helps me to concrete on my work better," said Tania. "Having such facilities is very helpful and as a mother, I can't ask for a better workplace."

The programme has been expanded to 80 factories over the course of 2019 and we are looking forward to seeing an improvement in compliance in forthcoming assessments.

\* Mothers@Work is a national programme to strengthen maternity rights and breastfeeding support in the workplace. It was initiated by UNICEF Bangladesh to promote, protect and support breastfeeding among working mothers and to ensure women's equal participation in the workforce. The programme was developed with generous financial support from Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and UNICEF, and contributions from BRAC and the NGO Phulki. Mothers@Work was launched jointly by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and with Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) in August 2017.



## Empowering women for leadership

**The garment industry has provided large-scale employment opportunities for women**

Better Work's global gender strategy strives for a society where women and men are free from gender-based discrimination, have equal and decent work opportunities, are able to access their rights, and have equal voice and representation. We believe this vision can become a reality in the workplace in Bangladesh, despite it being a traditionally male-dominant society.

In Bangladesh's RMG factories, 19 out of every 20 line supervisors are men despite 80% of workers being women. Better Work and the IFC responded to this issue through the GEAR initiative — which sets out to help women to build their competencies to advance their careers. GEAR offers female workers a 10-day training course on the technical requirements of becoming supervisors. The trainees then spend 6-8 weeks working on a production line as trainee supervisors to eventually take on supervisory roles.

The outcomes of GEAR pilot phase (November 2016 to December 2017) made it clear that the programme had the potential to overturn the industry's gender blind spots and in turn benefit

both the female workers and the factories employing them. In the initial phase, GEAR trained 144 female workers, 58 of whom became supervisors. An impact assessment carried out by the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom showed that:

- ◆ Lines led by GEAR-trained females experienced an average increase of 5% in efficiency;
- ◆ GEAR-promoted female supervisors saw — on average — a 39% increase in salary;
- ◆ The average percentage of female supervisors rose from 7% to 15% in 28 participating factories;
- ◆ Other benefits such as reduced absenteeism and lower defect rates.

Following this successful pilot, in March 2019, the ILO and the IFC started to scale-up GEAR to train approximately 500 female operators and their managers in 50 factories by 2021.

In 2019, 48 factories enrolled on the programme, 106 line supervisors completed GEAR, 79 have since been promoted to supervisory positions. A further 135 female line supervisors are currently enrolled on the GEAR programme.

### PROTECTING WOMEN IN TIMES OF COVID-19

The 2020 COVID-19 global health crisis has left female supervisors and workers, especially women, facing vulnerable situations, including physical and mental health risks and socio-economic challenges. As women supervisors directly manage teams of between 25-35, they have become the hardest hit group. As part of our crisis response, we are conducting virtual mediation exchanges with GEAR participants to ensure they can protect themselves and garments workers from COVID-19 and its potential impacts.

### OBJECTIVES OF OUR STRATEGY

1. To support female supervisors to exercise their leadership skills through managing COVID-19 crisis response;
2. To disseminate awareness information to workers and production management;
3. To continue to support GEAR women supervisors to become change makers and ambassadors.

## Working with brands to address sexual harassment

**This issue is still under-reported due to fears of stigma and retaliation**

Tackling violence and harassment at work, including sexual harassment has taken centre stage. Based on ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment, a gender-based violence training manual has been developed and distributed in factories, and continues to be reinforced via ongoing advisory services with factories, and capacity building with constituents. Better Work Bangladesh has increasingly expanded training to enterprises outside the programme, delivering tailored training packages, which aim to address individual factories issues, factory group issues, and industry level issues. The training ensures factories can build the culture and procedures to mitigate and address sexual harassment.

The programme has recorded factories taking greater strides to mitigating and address sexual harassment in their places of work. This is reflected in the greater demand and engagement around training on the issues:

- ◆ 24 training sessions on preventing sexual harassment;
- ◆ A five-day intensive training intervention for middle and top management of a manufacturing group;
- ◆ Two 'Violence and Harassment in the Workplace' trainings sessions, focusing on senior factory level management.



## Strong partnerships to ensure sustainability

Better Work Bangladesh builds on the strong foundations laid out since the programme launched operations in 2015. In line with the Better Work global strategy, our goals are as follows:

- ◆ Deliver a comprehensive range of tailored services, building factories' internal capacities to improve conditions and competitiveness;
- ◆ Engage with all stakeholders and forge partnerships to promote a policy and business environment that protects workers' rights and supports the sustainable development of the Bangladesh garment sector;
- ◆ Empower women workers, reduce sexual harassment in the workplace and close the gender pay gap.



### GOVERNMENT

We will work with the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), brand representatives, and employers' organisations, to advance the dialogue on purchasing practices and promoting sustainable improvements in the RMG sector. Increased engagement with the government around this topic and the long-term sustainability of the industry is crucial for 2020. We will also look to build the capacity of government agencies, including the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), jointly with the ILO RMG programme, and ensure that national institutions can effectively monitor social compliance and OSH standards in the sector. Better Work Bangladesh will also engage with the Department of Labour (DOL), and the ILO Social Dialogue and Industrial Relations Programme, to strengthen arbitration and conciliation mechanisms.



### PRIVATE SECTOR

We will work with private sector stakeholders to strengthen the industry's approach to reduce non-compliance. This can be achieved by expanding our programme to reach more factories and share knowledge about relevant industry topics in the garment sector. We will continue to partner with brands to increase trust and commitment around capacity building in factories, as well as utilising resources more efficiently. As in 2019, we will aim to conduct seminars with our partners to address common industry concerns like sexual harassment, freedom of association violations, and the lack of managerial skills.



### EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

We will aim to strengthen collaboration with employers' and workers' associations to improve working conditions, promote transparency, freedom of association, collective bargaining, and worker-management dialogue across the sector. Some initiatives will be essential for us in 2020. They include relationship building, meetings, and knowledge sharing as well as training for compliance teams from the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) who have been trained in Better Work's tools and methods.



### TRADE UNIONS

In 2020, we will work to strengthen links between workers' organisations and existing unions in Better Work factories and building the capacity of trade union officials engaged in fieldwork. Within enterprises, the programme will focus on building an environment that fosters effective trade union participation. We will strive to create a better understanding of Better Work and its work and to discuss ways to work more closely to promote effective industrial relations in the garment factories.



### GLOBAL DONORS

We will team up with other ILO programmes, as well as ILO tripartite constituents, brands and other stakeholders, to promote an annual review of the minimum wage. We will develop a platform allowing factories to exchange best practices, in partnership with other global donors through well-defined initiatives and programmes.

## ENSURING LASTING CHANGES

Better Work's involvement in Bangladesh aligns with the country's long-term vision and also that of its international partners. The Sustainability Compact brings together the European Union (EU), the Government of Bangladesh, the United States (US), Canada and the ILO along with employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders to promote continuous improvements in labour rights and factory safety in the RMG industry. The Compact is built on short- and long-term commitments related to three inter-linked pillars:

- 1.** Respect for labour rights;
- 2.** Structural integrity of buildings and OSH;
- 3.** Responsible business conduct.

Through its engagement with factories and constituents, data and enterprise-level expertise, Better Work Bangladesh is contributing to all pillars of the programme.

Check all non-compliance and compliance issues in our Transparency Portal here: [portal.betterwork.org/transparency](http://portal.betterwork.org/transparency)

 [betterwork.org/where-we-work/bangladesh](http://betterwork.org/where-we-work/bangladesh)

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