



# BetterWork

## Better Work Jordan: Worker and Manager Survey Results

POLICY  
BRIEF

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International  
Labour  
Organization



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## Introduction

The Better Work Jordan programme seeks to improve working conditions and enhance business competitiveness of the Jordanian garment industry. One important way to track, understand, and amend these efforts is by getting feedback directly from workers and managers. Better Work regularly gathers data directly from factories through advisory services and tracks non-compliance on over 200 issues during assessment visits. The impact indicator survey, now in the third round of data collection, provides additional data from a representative sample of workers and one manager from each factory on key issues including working conditions, stakeholder awareness, and personal life. The most recent survey took place in July 2020 and was administered to 1,750 workers and 71 managers in 72 factories across Jordan.

This is the third in a set of policy briefs that focus primarily on stakeholder engagement, grievance mechanisms, and worker concerns in the factory. Stakeholder engagement with workers is particularly important to document over time, as their role in promoting decent working conditions increases over time. In particular, this brief focuses on the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the single trade union for the sector, the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries and their representatives at the factory level.

There are two significant changes in this brief compared to the previous briefs that summarize 2019 data: the data were collected in the initial

period of industry disruption following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the survey includes a new section on mental wellbeing.

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## Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent government interventions halted work in garment factories during the months of March and April. While factories have been allowed to open since then in adherence to safety and health protocols, the global economic situation, and the economic fallout in the US in particular, have dramatically reduced business activity in the garment sector. Workers and managers were surveyed in July in the context of this pandemic – while the coronavirus situation in Jordan was quite stable during this time period (only 100 active cases at the end of July), the economic situation was much more tenuous. Covid-19 cases rose dramatically in Jordan starting in late August, and the virus has now touched several factories directly with confirmed positive cases mostly in the Dulayl and Sahab Industrial Zones.

Evidence from the workers' survey shows that hours and monthly pay both dropped after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. On average, workers reported working six hours less per week, with migrant workers facing the largest reduction in average weekly hours as factories reduced overtime work. This was accompanied by a 10 JD drop in monthly pay from before Covid-19, or roughly 5 per cent of pre-Covid pay.

While the survey results show evidence of a drop in

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<sup>1</sup> The policy brief summarizing the data gathered from December 2019 to January 2020 can be found on the Better Work website: "Better Work Jordan: Worker and Manager Survey Results", June 2020. Policy Brief. <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/better-work-jordan-worker-and-manager-survey-results/>. The policy brief summarizing the data gathered in June 2019 can also be found on the Better Work website: "Better Work Jordan: Worker Voice Survey Results", November 2019. Policy Brief. <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BWJ-Worker-Voice-Survey-Results-4-002.pdf>.

pay and hours, the remainder of survey responses were similar to the previous rounds of data collection. We find no evidence of a change in the opinions of workers on working conditions, living conditions and job stress, or on their health and working plans for the next three years.

While the continuity in questions allows us to track average responses over time, the same workers were not surveyed in the three rounds of data collection, so the comparison is imperfect. The data collected in July is a representative sample of workers who kept their jobs during Covid-19 and does not reflect the experiences of workers who lost their jobs or chose to resign. As such, the current survey data does not reflect the experiences of those workers most directly effected by the Covid-19 pandemic and should be considered as a lower bound for the effects of Covid-19 on the sector.

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## Findings

The following sections present key insights from the July 2020 surveys relating to worker concerns, grievance mechanisms and stakeholder engagement. Results from the July 2020 data collection are broadly similar to the last two rounds of data collected and as described in previous briefs.

Key findings include:

- Migrant workers are more likely than Jordanian workers to be aware of platforms for social dialogue, such as the bipartite committee, and of the presence of representatives from the union and the Ministry of Labour in the factory. Migrant workers also have more knowledge about the

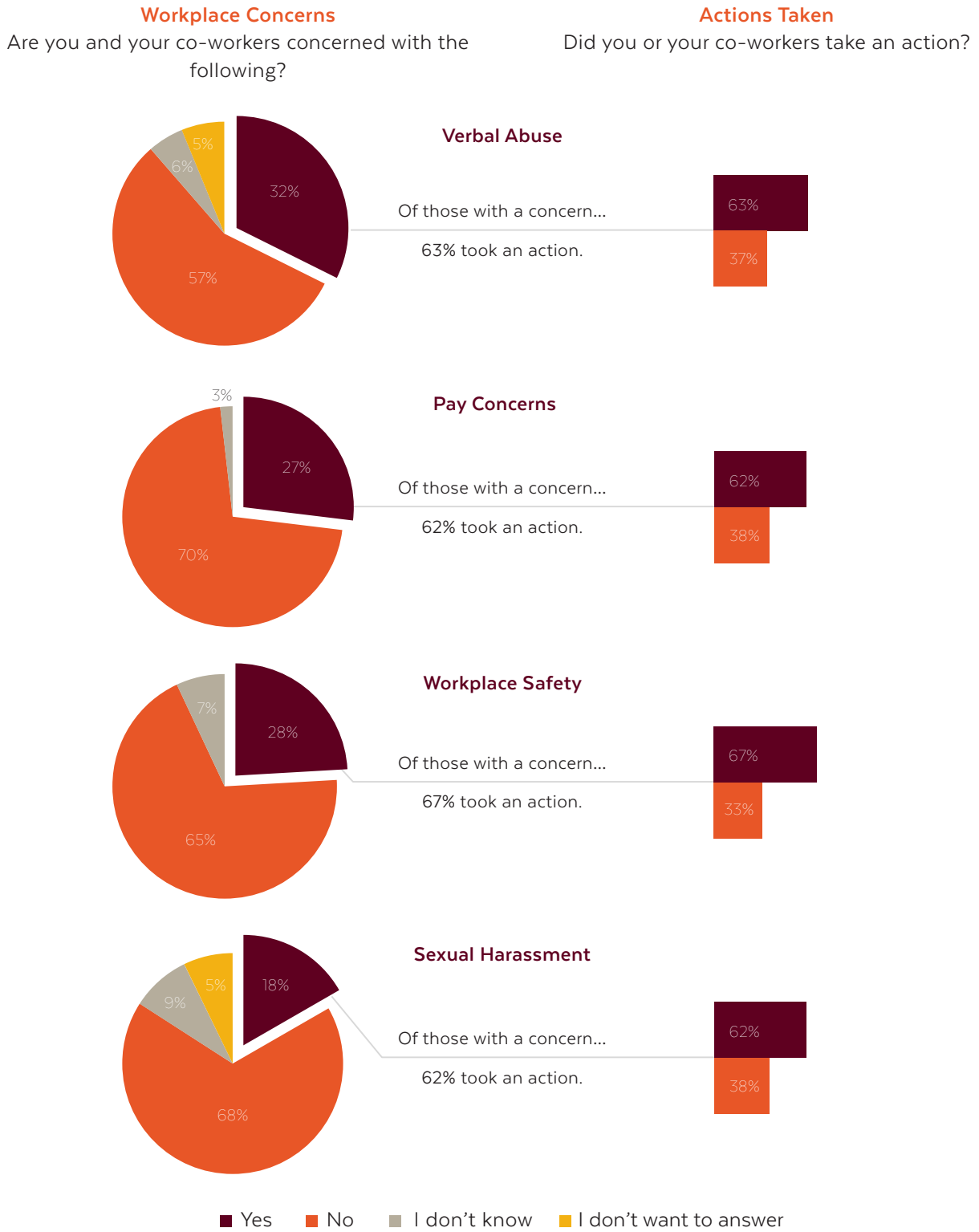
collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

- Whereas there are large differences in results between migrant workers and Jordanians, and even between different nationalities of migrant workers, there are very few differences in results between men and women, even when comparing within nationality.
- There are no sizeable differences in results in this round of data collection compared to the two rounds of data collected in 2019, despite the ongoing Covid-19 crisis.
- The survey provides one measure of mental wellbeing among workers, and results suggest there is significant variation in wellbeing based on gender and nationality.

### Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken

Garment workers in Jordan expressed concern with several aspects of working conditions in their factory. Among those who expressed a concern, the majority stated that they took some action as a result (Figure 1). The most common concern was with verbal abuse, with 33 per cent of workers stating that they or their co-workers were concerned with shouting or vulgar language. After concerns with verbal abuse, concerns are highest with pay (27% of workers), workplace safety (27%) and sexual harassment (18%). For each concern, workers were then asked to list the specific actions they took which ranged in severity from talking to co-workers to going on strike. Across all questions, roughly two thirds of workers said that they would take some follow up action in response to their workplace concerns. The percent of workers reporting concerns is broadly similar across rounds, but the percentage of workers who say they intend to take an action has been increasing since the first data collection in June 2019.

**Figure 1: Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken**



## IN FOCUS: MENTAL WELLBEING

Over the last few years, stakeholders in the garment sector have increasingly looked beyond the workplace to a more holistic view of worker wellbeing. It is key to acknowledge the issues of mental wellbeing and stress many workers face in their lives, both inside and outside of the workplace. The most recent CBA includes specific language directing factories to address worker wellbeing. Per the CBA, employers should provide training on the topic of mental wellbeing, refer workers to specialized healthcare organizations as the need arises, and cannot dismiss workers based on this referral. More broadly, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of mental health both globally and within Jordan.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this, Better Work Jordan added several questions on mental wellbeing into the worker survey with the goal to better understand the current situation with regards to mental wellbeing and to begin to identify the key factors behind wellbeing in the garment sector. The primary measure of wellbeing in the survey is the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), a set of seven questions that captures both hedonic wellbeing (positive feelings) and eudaimonic wellbeing (having a sense of purpose in life).<sup>3</sup> Results from the survey show that there are significant issues with mental wellbeing in the sector and that there is variation in wellbeing by both gender and nationality. On average, women have higher mental wellbeing than men. In addition, Bangladeshi and Jordanian workers have higher wellbeing on average, while workers from India have lower wellbeing on average.<sup>4</sup>

There are many drivers of mental wellbeing, including both personal and situational factors. Previous research in the garment sector in Jordan highlighted four areas that impact workers' mental wellbeing, particularly for migrant workers: working conditions, living conditions, personal factors, and gender dynamics in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> A preliminary analysis of the data shows that workers with lower mental health tend to also cite concerns with workplace safety and are more likely to say that there are issues with verbal abuse and sexual harassment in the factory. In addition, workers with lower mental health are more likely to feel isolated – this is particularly true for migrant workers: nearly 30 percent of migrant workers are not content with their friendships and relationships either in Jordan or in their home countries. This finding also extends to factory management; workers with low wellbeing are less likely to say that there is mutual trust between workers and management in their factory.

While the WEMWBS shows that there are issues with low mental wellbeing in the sector, other results from the survey paint a more complicated picture. For instance, 80 per cent of workers say that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their current life, and the distribution by nationality runs counter to the findings from the WEMWBS results, with Indian workers reporting the highest life satisfaction. Similarly, the vast majority of workers (82 per cent) report that their health is very good or good. The responses from managers fall somewhere in the middle: half of managers do not think that mental stress is a concern for workers with the remaining half mostly thinking that it is a low concern. Fourteen percent of managers think that mental stress among their workers is a moderate or serious concern.

<sup>2</sup> “Covid-19 crisis affects Jordanians’ mental health,” Published 2020-08-11. Roya News. <https://en.royanews.tv/news/21796/2020-08-11>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/using/register/resources>

<sup>4</sup> The WEMWBS is available in many languages, including Arabic, Bangla and Hindi. These translations are validated and verified through an intensive process, and WEMWBS restricts the use of the survey only to validated translations. For this reason, the seven WEMWBS questions were not translated into Sinhalese and Nepalese and workers from Sri Lanka and Nepal (15 per cent of the sample) did not respond to these questions.

<sup>5</sup> See Y Kristine Kim, Jingyi Song et al., Supporting Mental Well-being of Migrant Garment Workers in Jordan. Discussion Paper 33. Better Work Discussion Paper Series. <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/discussion-paper-33-supporting-mental-well-being-of-migrant-garment-workers-in-jordan/>

Concern among workers varies substantially by nationality. Verbal abuse has consistently been the top concern for workers, and is most often cited as a concern by Jordanian workers, regardless of gender, with over half of both male and female Jordanian workers saying that they are concerned with verbal abuse. On the other hand, Sri Lankan workers are by far the most likely to cite concerns with workplace safety with 80 per cent of Sri Lankan workers saying that they are concerned with dangerous equipment and the potential for injury in the factory. Sexual harassment concerns are highest for Indian workers (nearly all male) and Jordanian workers (regardless of gender). In contrast, pay concerns, which are highest for concerns of low pay, timeliness, and accuracy of pay, are shared across nationalities. Across all four concerns (verbal abuse, pay, workplace safety and sexual harassment), Bangladeshi workers are the least likely to report concerns, with Bangladeshi women even less likely than Bangladeshi men to report concerns. This may be attributable to the experiences of Bangladeshi workers in the factory where they are most frequently in the majority, but it may also be attributable to their agency and willingness to freely express themselves in the survey.

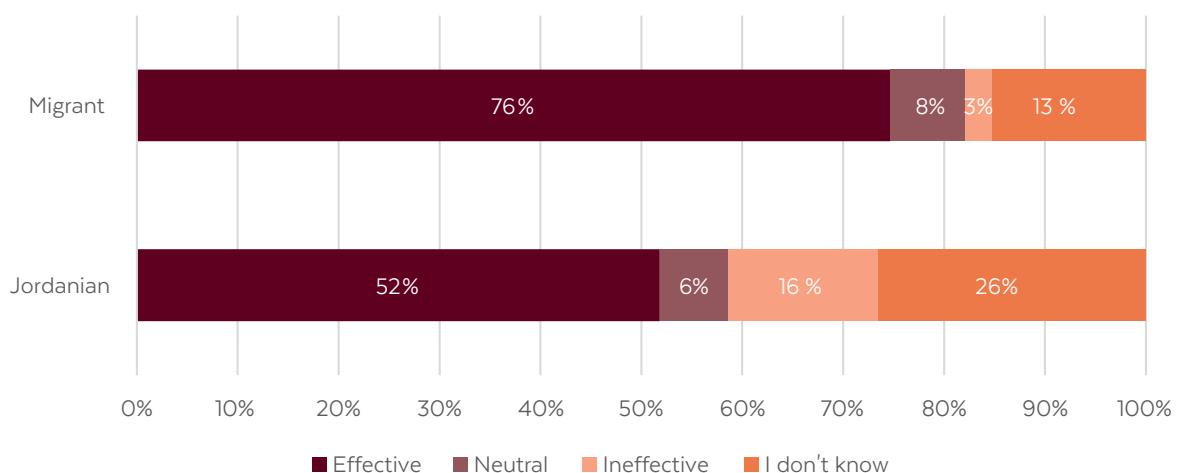
### Workers' Perspectives on Grievance Mechanisms

While the number of workers reporting concerns

with key aspects of working conditions is high, it is also important to look at how and if they are able to resolve these concerns. Above, we explored actions taken for specific concerns. Roughly two thirds of workers with a concern indicated that they took some action in response to this concern. The majority of these workers simply talked to their co-workers or supervisors, but some sought to use more formal channels such as the bipartite committee or speaking with the HR manager. While workers appear to use more informal channels when they have problems in the workplace, the majority of workers indicated that they were satisfied with the opportunities in the factory to voice their grievances (80% of workers indicated satisfied or very satisfied).

The majority of workers say that the bipartite committee is effective, but there are large gaps between migrant workers and Jordanians (Figure 2). Half of Jordanians think the committee is effective, compared to three quarters of migrant workers. Jordanians are twice as likely as migrant workers to not know about the bipartite committee or how effective it is. There is almost no gender difference in this question, even within-nationality. Managers were asked this same question, and 91 per cent of managers said that they thought the committee was effective.

**Figure 2: Effectiveness of bipartite committee**

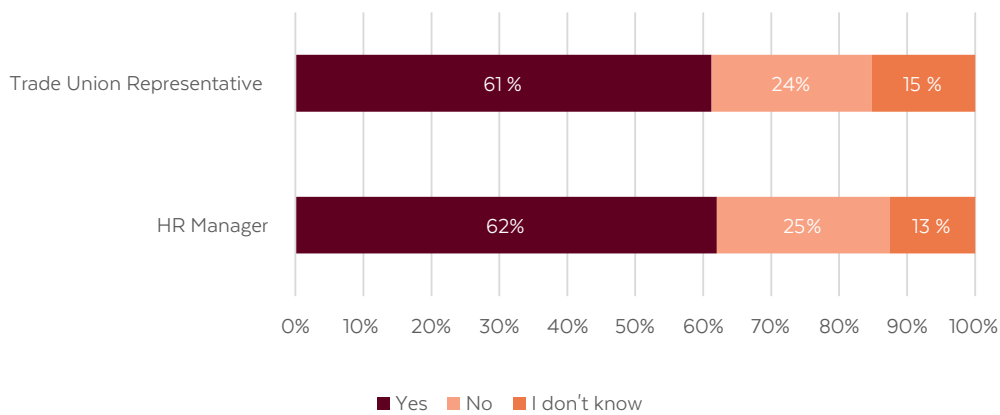




When asked directly about whether they would feel comfortable or not going to see someone in HR with a problem in the workplace or someone in the union, most workers responded positively (Figure 3). Over half of workers (62 per cent) feel comfortable going to HR, and roughly the same percentage of workers said

they would feel comfortable going to the union (61 per cent). Jordanian workers, regardless of whether they work in satellite factories, exporting factories or subcontracting factories, are the least likely to say that they feel comfortable going to the union with a problem in the workplace.

**Figure 3: Do you feel comfortable going to the following if you have a problem in the workplace?**

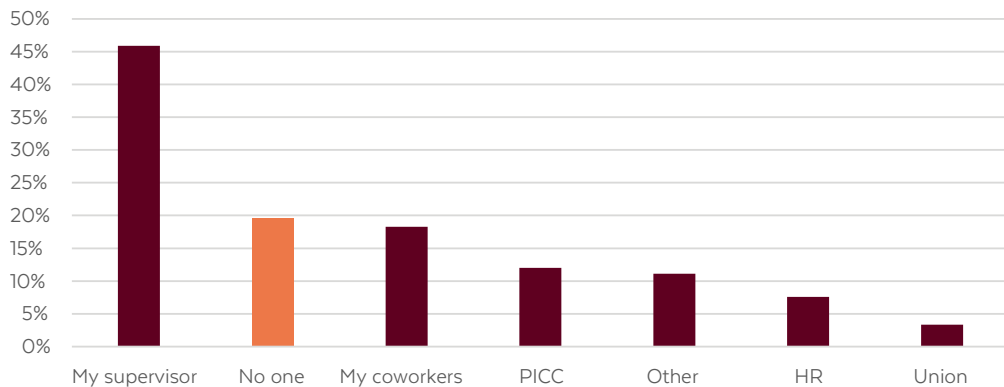


A subset of workers answered a similar question that was presented differently: they were shown a list of options and asked to select all of the people they felt comfortable going to with a problem in the workplace (this question was used in previous rounds of data collection). When asked to choose from a list of multiple options, far fewer workers indicated that they would be comfortable going to HR managers or union representatives, opting instead for their

supervisors or co-workers (Figure 4).

While this data provides some useful insights, especially in terms of relative preferences and the per cent of workers who do not feel comfortable going to anybody, it also may underestimate how comfortable workers are in going to different people as they may not check multiple boxes even if they feel comfortable going to multiple people.

**Figure 4: Who do you feel comfortable going to if you have a problem?**



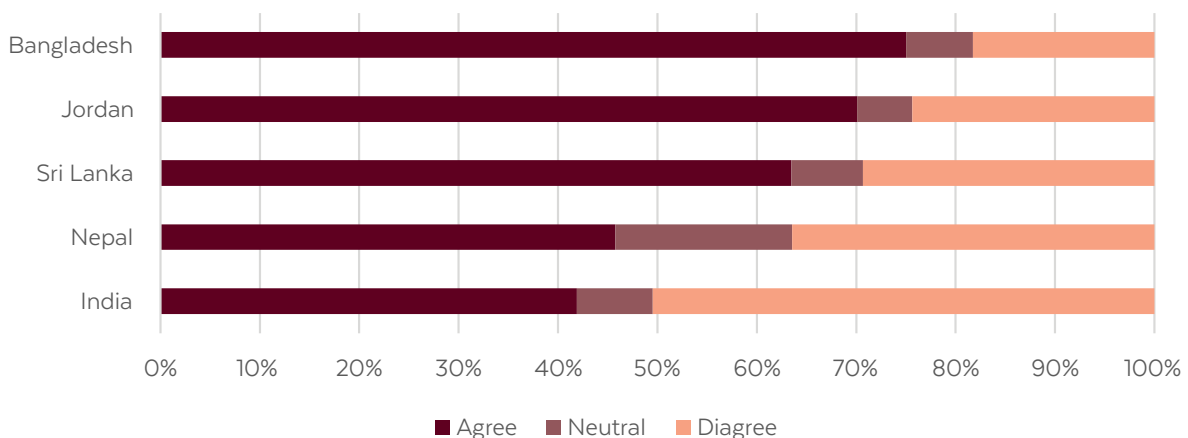
### Trust between workers and managers

Trust between workers and managers is an important element of factory success and is key to the Better Work model of factory improvement through social dialogue. Workers and managers were both asked if there was mutual trust in their factory – 66 per cent of workers agreed that there was mutual trust between workers and managers, whereas 70 out of the 71 managers (or 96 per cent) agreed. Fewer workers in the newest round of data collection think that there is

mutual trust, and this is especially true among those who “strongly disagree” that there is mutual trust.

Drilling into the numbers, there are significant differences by nationality on the perceived trust within the factory (Figure 5). Indian workers are the least likely to think that there is mutual trust, and they are the driver behind the change since the last survey round – now 50 per cent of Indian workers disagree, whereas in December 2019, 40 per cent of them disagreed.

**Figure 5: There is mutual trust between workers and management in this factory**



### Awareness of laws and support systems

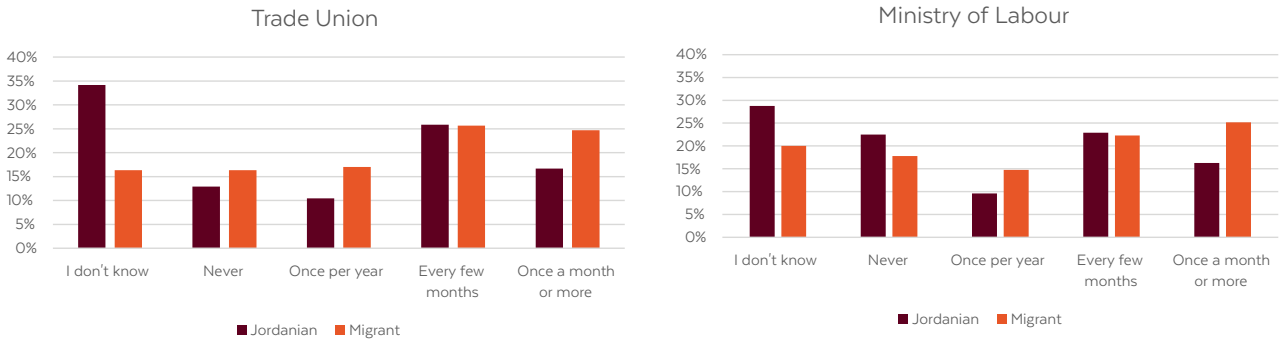
The majority of workers report an awareness of key stakeholders, such as union representatives and labour inspectors from the Ministry of Labour. Workers are also aware of key laws and support systems including the sector-wide CBA and aspects of the Jordanian Labour Law governing work in garment factories. However, this awareness differed markedly between Jordanian workers and migrant workers, with migrant workers much more likely to recognize representatives from the union, and to a lesser extent, representatives from the ministry of labour, in the factory (Figure 6).

Jordanian workers are more likely than migrant

workers to say that they don't know who is visiting the factory. This is especially true for the union, where 34% of Jordanians said they don't know how often the union comes compared to 16% of migrant workers. This number for Jordanians has increased since December when it stood at 26%. Similarly, there is a gap in knowledge about the provisions of the industry-wide Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Half of Jordanian workers are not aware of the CBA, compared to 30 per cent of migrant workers. These numbers are lower for Jordanian workers compared to December 2019, but higher for migrant workers. In contrast, overall more workers are aware of the labour law, and the gap between nationalities is not nearly as large, if anything Jordanians are more likely to know about the labour laws.



**Figure 6: How often have you seen a representative from the following in your factory?**



## Next Steps

This brief provides a snapshot of the data gathered through worker and manager surveys. This information is important for stakeholders to see and track how workers perceive them, and provides important information to employers about specific worker concerns and who workers turn to in order to address these concerns. Several upcoming reports will expand on the information provided here and take it in new directions. In particular, an upcoming

report will present more in-depth information on mental wellbeing in the sector. The data from these surveys also feeds into the monitoring and evaluation of the Better Work Jordan programme and into the programming developed by Better Work Jordan.

These worker and manager surveys are part of an ongoing project spearheaded by the Better Work Global research team and carried out in conjunction with Better Work Jordan and a local research partner. Two rounds of data collection are planned for June 2021 and 2022.



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