

# Better Work Jordan

## End of Year Newsletter

December 2020



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## Dear Friends,

It has been over ten years since Better Work Jordan established its operations in the country, accepting the challenge of extending its mandate to the garment industry in cooperation with local and international stakeholders.

BWJ has risen to the occasion. After joining forces with all levels of the garment industry, and lately with those of other manufacturing sectors, the programme and its partners delivered their promises: improving working conditions and respect of labour rights for workers, while boosting the competitiveness of apparel businesses.

But the COVID-19 pandemic came as sudden blow to the reality we have built, both globally and locally. It hit our lives with a brutal, although temporary, shaking of the status quo, challenging the results and milestones achieved so far.

As the country is going through its most difficult moment in the pandemic, BWJ is focusing on its mandate, helping guarantee the safety of workers and the survival of the sector by all possible means.

After almost four months of suspending on-the-ground delivery of Better Work Jordan core services, Better Work Jordan resumed their field assessment visits to its affiliated factories in July. But following the surge in coronavirus cases that started in September, the programme had to suspend its field operations to protect its team members, switching again to a virtual form of advisory visits and training sessions.

Still, BWJ's direct contact with workers and stakeholders never ceased and uninterrupted work with all its partners has been carried out to help them navigate through the storm.

Mirroring the situation in the global supply chain, the country's garment sector exports have contracted by some 25% this year, according to the Jordan Garments, Accessories and Textiles Exporter's Association.

Over 5,000 coronavirus cases have been registered across the local garment industry, and more than ten workers died since the inception of the pandemic. Sixteen factories announced temporarily closures in

2020, six others have permanently shut down.

Disputes between workers and factory ensued amid the health crisis, requiring a mature effort of all parties to bring them to an end. This highlighted the need for a strengthened grievance mechanism at the disposal of the sector's workers to vent their frustration, whose implementation is currently under discussion.

During any crisis, regardless if timely or life-altering, decisions must be made, requiring an extreme amount of sound judgment under uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different.

To this end, national stakeholders have repeatedly come together to find new, alternative ways to overcome the challenges posed by the pandemic and think of future growth opportunities for the sector, also confiding in a robust support at the policy-level.

The new government has put economic recovery from the pandemic at the centre of its programme and if the industry rebounds, there may be additional demand for Jordanian labour, which is currently witnessing an extremely high unemployment rate.

Meanwhile, some apparel companies have returned to former production levels and hired those migrant workers who had lost their job in the sector during the year. Manufacturers have also been buoyed by strong demand in the U.S. for sports and leisurewear, which accounts for the majority of Jordanian production.

Work is also in the making to develop a 10-year national sector strategy to help the sector's recovery from the impact of the pandemic, while also guaranteeing its sustainability and transformation.

As countries around the world have begun vaccinating its citizens with a COVID-19 shot outside of clinical trials, reaching a landmark moment in the coronavirus pandemic, we might be beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

Our task now is to keep cooperating and resisting through the last stretch of the unprecedented obstacle course this pandemic has forced us all to brave.

*Stay healthy and safe,  
The Better Work Jordan Team*







# برنامج عمل أفضل الأردن

## المنتدى السنوي الثاني عشر لأصحاب المصلحة المتعددين

### Better Work Jordan

#### 12<sup>th</sup> Annual stakeholders' Forum



Canada



International  
Labour  
Organization



## Better Work Jordan holds the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Stakeholders' Forum Virtually

Better Work Jordan held its 12th annual Stakeholders' Forum virtually this year, bringing together high-level national and international officials and representatives from participating global retail brands. Under the main theme "Towards Decent Work: Challenges Presenting Opportunities", the participants discussed the current challenges and emerging opportunities in the Jordanian garment sector through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the forum, representatives from the Ministry of Labour, the Trade Union and The Jordan Garments, Accessories & Textiles Exporter's Association (JGATE) discussed the current economic and social situation in Jordan in light of the pandemic and its implications for the local garment sector.

In addition, Better Work Jordan presented its ongoing

project to digitize wage payments in Jordan's garment sector in partnership with Better than Cash Alliance (BtCA) and GIZ. The ten-month project was launched in early 2020 and directly supports a group of garment factories in exploring different ways to transition from cash to digital payment methods.

Better Work Jordan also gave an overview of the progress made in the Enhancing the Structural Integrity of Dormitory Building in the Garment Sector project. Through this intervention, the programme aims to understand the current situation of the dormitory buildings, and develop a roadmap to upgrade these housing units in alignment with international codes and best practices across the sector.

[Read more](#)



## Better Work Jordan Highlights

### Better Work Jordan and Jordan's Garment Union join hands amid health crisis

#### Better Work Jordan & factory managers

In response to the growing number of COVID-19 infection cases registered across the country and within the garment sector, factories have scaled up the implementation of health measures in their facilities and dormitories to ensure the safety of their workers.

Meanwhile, BWJ is continuing its virtual interactions with factory managers, providing its support amid the emergency and checking on workers' health.

Throughout the year, BWJ Enterprise Advisors (EAs) have discussed with factory managers prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 at work and ways of efficiently communicating these measures with the workers.

"Factory representatives have been cooperative when contacted to discuss their workers' health and the operational status of their businesses," said BWJ EA Abdeljawad Alnatsheh. "A number of factories provided the requested information beforehand, showing they had been following standard operating procedures in accordance with the instructions issued by the Ministries of Labour and Health."

Factory representatives told BWJ in a recent survey they had been implementing safety measures in their

facilities, with their workers wearing face-masks during their shifts and respecting social distancing across the factory floor. The establishment of partitions to separate manufacturing workers from each other in the production line and the use of markers on the floor to set out social distancing were additional preventive measures adopted by the factories.

A number of factories also had employees working in the same facility share housing units to prevent the spread of possible infection among the workforce. Around 40 percent of BWJ affiliated factories set up quarantine areas for workers testing positive for coronavirus, while some 30 percent set up additional quarantine areas for suspected cases.

Over 60 percent of BWJ affiliated factories said that representatives of the Ministries of Health and Labour had been actively engaging with them through regular visits. The Ministry of Health has been in charge of conducting COVID-19 PCR tests on workers throughout the health crisis.

Fifty percent of the factories reported an interaction with the country's trade union group during the pandemic.





## Better Work Jordan & migrant workers

**B**WJ reached out to over 500 workers through direct phone calls in November, conducting interviews on the impact of the pandemic on their daily life, the precautions they were taking during the COVID-19 outbreak and how they were staying informed.

Women, mostly hailing from Asia and Southeast Asia and currently working and residing in Jordan's industrial areas, accounted for about 90 percent of the interviewees.

Since its onset, the unprecedented health crisis has sent shockwaves through the foreign workforce of the country's garment sector, which represents around 75 percent of the total number of workers. Bangladeshi nationals make around 60 percent of the sector's foreign workforce, followed by Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepali, Burmese and Pakistani workers.

Migrant workers, who live and work in Jordan's industrial zones on fixed-term contracts, became increasingly confused and concerned amid the pandemic.

"When I started making these calls, some workers were reluctant to share their information with me," says Sumana Akther, a BWJ consultant from Bangladesh. "But soon after that, they began to open up and talk about their concerns. The majority of these workers worry about receiving deducted monthly wages and becoming infected."

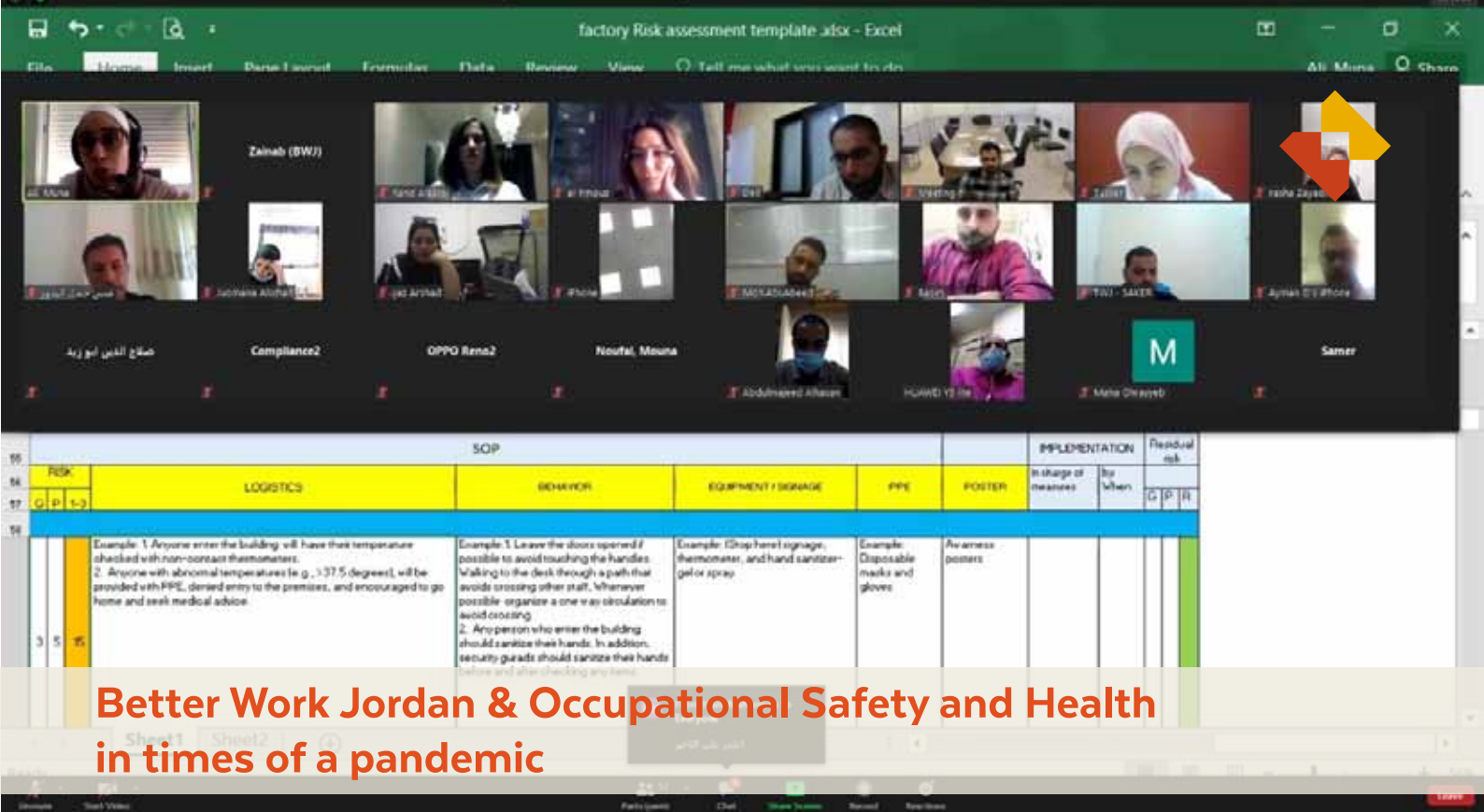
During the phone calls, workers were asked about the preventive measures they were taking to reduce the risk of infection. While almost all workers said they were regularly using masks and frequently washed their hands, only around 20 percent of them said they were respecting social distancing measures. Up to eight workers share a single room in the dormitories of Jordan's industrial areas, making it impossible to observe social distancing rules.

The majority of the workers said they had received information about COVID-19 through social media, friends and family members. Less than 10 percent of the workers interviewed said their employers had kept them informed and less than one percent reported contacts with the trade union group.

About 80 percent of the workers contacted reported a reduction in their income and working hours. Also around 75 percent of them said that they or one of their family members had experienced greater mental stress since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine percent of the workers said they had been suspended from their jobs.

"I'm talking with many workers who have recently tested positive for COVID-19," Akther says. "During these calls, I'm trying to comfort them through exercises aimed to relieve their mental stress."

[Read more](#)



## Better Work Jordan & Occupational Safety and Health in times of a pandemic

**B**WJ run a virtual seminar on Biological Risk Assessment in October, targeting 50 Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) officers from its participating factories.

The seminar aimed to build the capacity of OSH officers to develop a biological risk assessment process inside and outside their factory premises, spanning dormitories and outdoor areas.

Participants discussed ways of identifying potential risks and hazards in their factories, while also going through mitigations and COVID-19 preventive measures. Each factory’s biological risk assessment will later become part of the programme’s upcoming OSH guide on preventive measures for COVID-19 biological hazard.

“The seminar helped me build further capacity to analyse the factory internal and external environment, while also providing me with new ideas about potential hazards,” says Jumana Al Sarhan, an OSH officer working in one of Jordan’s satellite unit. “As a result, I have added preventive measures for potential

risks in the factory outdoor areas to the factory risk assessment plan and shared it with the management for its feedback.”

Mohammed Al Nadi, another OSH officer who attended the seminar, agreed.

“Thanks to the training, our factory’s risk assessment plan now starts from the moment our bus picks workers up in the morning to the moment it takes them home at the end of the working day,” he says.

Additional talks touched on the implementation of OSH standard operating procedures issued by the Labour Ministry amid the health emergency, besides the best OSH practices adopted by each factory during the crisis.

BWJ, the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment, and Clothing Industries and the Workers’ Centre in Al Hassan Industrial Zone have also carried out a COVID-19 awareness-raising campaign over the past few months targeting garment workers employed in the area.





## Supporting Jordan's apparel industry: the garment sector strategy

In collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Amman, BWJ and local stakeholders have been working with a scholar from North Carolina-based Duke University on drafting a series of recommendations for the improvement of the local apparel industry to support its expansion and sustainability in the next decade.

As a starting point, the researcher analysed the government's expectations for its local garment industry and ways the private sector could fulfill such expectations.

Initial suggestions included in the strategy highlighted the need for more government investment to boost the working skills of Jordanians, thus contributing to cut the country's staggering unemployment rate, currently at about 24 percent. This effort should come on top of the investment already provided by the private sector to achieve this goal.

Both parties agree that Jordanians could fill middle management positions in the sector as accountants, HR managers, logistic and finance experts. As a consequence, the education system in Jordan could also help fill this gap by providing students with the set of skills needed for these posts.

Based on global averages, these occupations may create between 7,500-12,000 new jobs for locals in Jordan.

"We are supporting national partners in mapping out the roles available at the middle management levels in the local garment industry," says BWJ Programme Manager Tareq Abu Qaoud. "This information could be later used by our education system, helping students acquire the appropriate know-how to work in the industry."

Another element of the new, ambitious garment sector strategy is trying to read Jordan's business environment through the lens of its predictability and tax system, thus coming up with ways to improve its ecosystem to generate more opportunities for the garment sector.

Initial recommendations were made before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We now need to continue facilitating the dialogue between the government of Jordan and the private sector in order to come up with a solid strategy for the garment industry everyone can agree upon," Abu Qaoud says. "It is crucial that the ensuing strategy considers the state of the sector following the pandemic but keeps in mind the needs of the industry in the next ten years."

## Better Work Jordan & the Labour Ministry

BWJ and the Ministry of Labour brought about new projects in 2020 based on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that the Ministry and the International Labour Organization signed in Amman earlier this year.

The MoU outlined ways in which the two parties could strengthen their collaboration to enhance the capacities of inspectors in protecting workers and promoting decent work in the Kingdom.

As a result of the agreement, a BW section has been established within the Inspection Directorate in MoL main offices in Amman and Irbid and an Evaluation Tool guide produced and recently submitted to the Ministry.

Further plans contained in the MoU include the identification of technical skills and training needs of labour inspectors, and provide support in the development of an electronic inspection system, which is set to improve the labour inspection's overall efficiency.





## Labour inspector secondment programme

**B**WJ concluded the third round of its labour inspector secondment programme in November. Carried out in cooperation with the European Union, the programme involved 12 labour inspectors receiving a string of in-class and field trainings throughout the year.

Also, 30 labour inspectors have received BWJ training in 2020. Training topics include BW services, assessment guidelines, national and international labour standards, sexual harassment prevention (SHP), virtual facilitation skills, advisory services and explanation of labour-related defense orders.

## Better Work Jordan & Jordan's trade union

**T**he close collaboration between BWJ and the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries continued throughout the health crisis.

Four union organisers of different nationalities have joined the local trade union group in November to help increase their worker outreach across Jordan's garment factories. Three Bangladeshi union organisers are now working in the union offices located in the country's industrial zones. Meanwhile, a Jordanian union organiser is currently in charge of supporting local workers across the factory satellite units, where the majority of Jordanian workers are employed.

In line with the content of the unified contract for the

garment migrant workers, which states that the employer is responsible for the entire employment process including the worker's travel arrangements, BWJ helped broker a new agreement between the Jordan Garments, Accessories & Textiles Exporter's Association (JGATE) and the union group for the repatriation of foreign workers.

The agreement was signed on September 21 and provides for the employer to arrange and cover travel expenses for migrant workers who need to return to their home countries, in addition to their pre-departure or arrival COVID-19 testing.

The measure has been included to the 2019 Collective Bargaining Agreement and applies to all garment-exporting factories in Jordan.





## Better Work Jordan & JGATE

**B**WJ and the Jordan Garments, Accessories & Textiles Exporter's Association (JGATE) signed on 13 December a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) over ways of strengthening industrial relations and jointly support the country's garment factories in the next years.

Based on the implementation of a number of actions suggested in the initial draft of the garment sector

strategy, the parties' common interest is to build the capacity of the JGATE to represent the exporting garment sector at the local and international level.

The MoU also provides for the deliverance of additional training to the sector's employers to further build their knowledge about the implementation of decent working conditions and the application of international labour standards across the country's apparel factories.

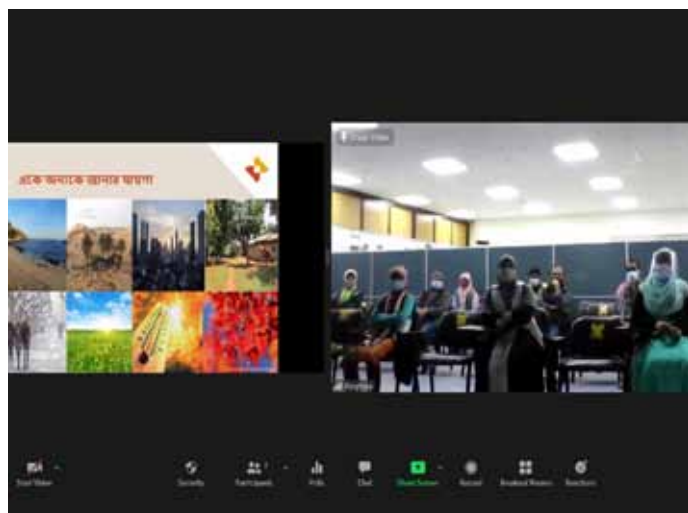
## Better Work Jordan and worker well-being

**J**ob insecurity, reduction in working hours, shutdown of factories and the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and dormitories have taken a toll on the garment workers' mental health over the past six months.

Since March, BWJ has conducted informal surveys with workers, gathering information concerning their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the semi-structured phone calls that BWJ and Jordan's trade union have made with workers during the March-May lockdown, mental stress came up as one of the workers' key concern.

In the most recent phone calls made in between October and November 2020 over 70 per cent of the workers said that they or their family members had experienced greater mental stress since the onset of the pandemic.

In light of the unprecedented situation, BWJ is currently piloting a new training course to improve worker mental well-being across the local garment sector, which the



programme is set to scale up next year.

Training modules aim to help workers build resilience against stress and become more aware of their mental health, well-being and physical health. A training section targeting middle managers asks them to reflect on their own well-being, develop an empathetic connection with the workers and think of ways of promoting worker well-being.





## Collaboration with the Better than Cash Alliance (BtCA)

Through Better Work Jordan partnership with UN-based Better Than Cash Alliance, our focus on driving wages digitization in Jordan's garment sector is continuing. In the past few months, technical assistance, company management and workers' interviews have been completed across 5 factories, representing 25% of garment workers in Jordan, to identify learning and lessons for a responsible transition to digital wages. The initial insights were presented to the Better Work Jordan Advisory Committee (July 2020), to the DFS Jordan council organized by GIZ (September 2020) and at the Better Work Jordan Annual Stakeholders' Virtual Forum in November 2020.

What we learned is that there are significant benefits to be gained by companies and workers by switching to digital payments. However, a responsible transition requires careful planning, time and collaboration to be accomplished successfully.

On the whole, factories acknowledge the benefits to adopting digital wage payments with over one third of the garment sector workforce currently receiving digital payments.

For workers, their key concerns for adopting digital services include limited digital literacy and language skills (particularly for migrant workers), potential costs, and access to cash out points. However, where factories have successfully transitioned, workers are seeing the benefits: "I prefer the digital payment methods over cash because it's safer than cash." "Receiving my salary through digital payment methods makes it easier to keep track of my spending."

The regulatory environment in Jordan is very supportive and rapidly enabling digital payments. It is also continuing to explore opportunities to spend digitally, which will stimulate further adoption.

So whilst the future looks bright for Jordan in terms of payment digitization, more collaboration will be needed to ensure successful and responsible transition to digital payments in the garment sector. In early 2021, we will be publishing a public report based on these findings with good practices and recommendations for private and public sector stakeholders.

## Enhancing the Structural Integrity of Dormitory Buildings in Jordan's Garment Sector

With the support of the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), BWJ is working on establishing a roadmap for the upgrade of existing dormitory buildings across the country's garment industry, making sure safe and decent living conditions are provided and human rights respected.

BWJ has so far completed structural assessment of 14 dormitory buildings through a technical consulting firm.

Results of the investigation alongside international and national building codes served as the basis for BWJ's report on the structural, fire and electrical safety guidelines that future dormitories should implement to guarantee the workers' safety.

Key findings of the project were presented during BWJ 12th Stakeholders' Forum in November.



## Better Work Jordan Gender strategy 2019-2022

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, BWJ's activities for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment across the local garment sector continued throughout 2020.

BWJ is more committed than ever to addressing discrimination in the workplace, improving health and wellbeing, increasing the voice and representation of women, and increasing leadership and skill development opportunities for women through its virtual programme activities and collaboration with national stakeholders.

Although activities contributing to the success of the gender strategy, particularly joint efforts with the union and policy advocacy work, have been delayed due to other priorities during the response to COVID-19, achieving gender equality remains a key goal in Jordan,

where the government pledged to close the gender equality gap by 2030.

Drawing on the Better Work Global gender strategy, the BWJ strategy has been adapting more general tenets to its local context. In particular, the Jordan gender strategy had to adopt an intersectional approach by acknowledging the multiple identities of the people characterising its local garment sector, including migrant workers, Jordanians, refugees and persons with disabilities.

Have a look at the content of the programme four-year strategy through the link below or skip to the next section for an update on the strategy's latest activities.

[Download the document](#)



# Better Work Jordan 2020 publications

## *Better Work Jordan Worker and Manager Survey Results (November 2020)*

This is the third in a set of policy briefs that focus primarily on stakeholder engagement, grievance mechanisms, and worker concerns in the factory. The report is based on a worker and manager survey conducted during July 2020. The impact indicator study, 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.

[Download the report](#)

## *Better Work Jordan: Worker Well-being in Jordan's Garment Sector (November 2020)*

The main findings point at many ways in which key stakeholders can support the well-being of workers. Increasing compliance with labour laws and supporting decent working conditions support the wellbeing of workers. Employers can also help identify mental health issues, provide preliminary support, and refer workers to external help.

[Download the report](#)

## *Gender Strategy Review and Update (November 2020)*

This document reflects on the progress made in achieving BWJ gender strategy in the last year and a half through self-reflections and programming evaluations and the activities conducted with the Ministry of Labour and the Union. It eventually lays out what more needs to be done by both BWJ and key stakeholders to achieve the ambitious goals of the programme's gender strategy, also considering the new, unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Download the report](#)

## *Covid-19 Infographic (November 2020)*

This infographic presents the latest figures from the Jordanian garment sector in light of the pandemic. The data gathered here is from publicly available sources and through Better Work interaction with workers and managers as of 15 November and as of 24 November for the number of Covid-19 cases. The document includes basic data-points from phone calls with workers and managers undertaken during this time. The information presented is subject to change.

[Download the document](#)

Better Work is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in collaboration with local and international stakeholders. It unites the expertise of the ILO in labour standards with that of the IFC in private sector development

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