



BetterWork

**Better Work Jordan
gender strategy:
progress report
and update**



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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. 48 percentage of the total costs of the program in 2019 was financed with Federal funds, for a total of 881,911 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.

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This project is co-funded by
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1 Introduction

The Better Work programme, national stakeholders, and international actors have long recognized the importance of gendered power dynamics in the apparel industry, where women in low-wage jobs dominate the workforce with men in supervisory and management positions.

These gender inequities impede access to decent working conditions for women and men in the sector. Better Work Jordan formulated its gender strategy in 2018 through consultation with national stakeholders to reflect four key goals for the garment industry and the steps necessary to achieve them.¹ Through programme activities and collaboration with national stakeholders, Better Work Jordan aims to address discrimination in the workplace,

improve health and wellbeing, increase the voice and representation of women, and increase leadership and skill development opportunities for women. This document reflects on the progress made in achieving the gender strategy in the last year and a half and lays out what more needs to be done by both BWJ and key stakeholders to make the vision a reality.

¹ Better Work Jordan Gender Strategy 2019-2022, 31 March 2019. <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/better-work-jordan-gender-strategy-2019-2022/>



2 Background

Achieving gender equality is a key goal both internationally and in Jordan, where the government committed to closing the gender equality gap by 2030.² Addressing gender is particularly important in the garment industry, where the majority of workers are women, particularly those in low-wage and low-skill jobs.

The Better Work programme works in the garment industry in many countries and has sought to improve working conditions and compliance with national laws and international labour standards throughout the global garment industry. Research on the Better Work programme has shown that promoting gender equality is one of the key mechanisms through which working conditions in the garment sector have improved in the past.

In an effort to build on these findings, the Better Work Global gender strategy formalizes the gender approach of the Better Work programme, while the Better Work Jordan Gender Strategy adjusts the global strategy for the context in Jordan. In particular, the Jordan gender strategy takes an intersectional approach by acknowledging the multiple identities of people, including migrant workers, Jordanians, refugees and persons with disabilities.³ This gender strategy also goes beyond women's empowerment in that it focuses on both women and men who are both affected by gender norms. However, it is important to acknowledge the reality that women historically and currently face many economic, cultural, and political disadvantages and that systems and policies need to work to counteract these inequalities. These challenges are compounded for migrant workers and workers with disabilities.

Since the launch of the BWJ gender strategy, some important changes have affected the gender strategy. In June 2019, the ILO ratified Convention 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. This establishes new global standards to end violence and harassment in the workplace, and specifically mentions gender-based violence as a pervasive form of violence and harassment at work. The convention will enter into force in June 2021, but in the meantime, it provides guidance and definitions for many key issues of violence and harassment and outlines the roles and responsibilities of constituents.⁴ Of particular relevance to migrant workers in Jordan, the Convention states that employers are responsible for providing safe, respectful and violence-free accommodations.

In addition, the whole world has changed drastically in the last six months due to the Covid-19 pandemic, government policies to control the spread of the virus, and the resulting global economic contraction. The garment industry in Jordan is no exception, where the virus and resulting government actions have strained companies and forced many to downsize. This pandemic has two potential effects from a gender lens: it disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, including women and migrant workers, and it has made it more difficult for Better Work Jordan and national stakeholders to implement concrete activities in the gender strategy.

2 *Jordan pledges to align national laws with international commitments and expand support to women and girls in many areas*, UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/step-it-up/commitments/jordan>

3 Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw that focuses on multiple layers of discrimination and the power structures that keep these overlapping systems in place. For more on gender from an intersectional perspective, see Almen, M. (2015). *Gender Mainstreaming with an Intersectional Perspective*. Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research.

4 *Ratification of ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention C190*, June 2020, ILO, https://www.ilo.org/suva/public-information/videos/WCMS_753541/lang--en/index.htm

3 Progress and Activities

Both Better Work Jordan and implementing partners have made progress in achieving the goals of the gender strategy in the last year and a half. This work is both internal (through self-reflections and evaluations of programming) and external (through the activities conducted).

BWJ and Stakeholder Gender Reflections

The first step in achieving the BWJ gender strategy was through gender reflection workshops in which all staff in the programme were trained and enhanced their awareness on gender issues and intersecting forms of discrimination. The internal training included two guided workshops from an international expert and staff reflections on their personal experiences of gender, followed by a training on gender-equal and inclusive facilitation skills. Staff were also trained on how to promote gender equality in the programmes' activities and in all engagements with national stakeholders. This was an important moment of reflection for the Better Work programme, and gave staff a springboard to adjust existing programming and approaches through a gender lens. While the first key steps were taken in 2018 and 2019, the work to reflect on gender internally is ongoing. BWJ initially developed an action plan on gender, but it is now fully integrated in the Programme's broader workplan. For example, the programme has

re-examined training material from an intersectional lens and readjusted as necessary.

Better Work Jordan has also facilitated reflections with national stakeholders on gender. For labour inspectors at the Ministry of Labour this included specific training on how to investigate and identify cases of sexual harassment. Better Work has sought to train men and women labour inspectors in equal numbers despite the fact that men make up the vast majority of all labour inspectors. The process with the union is ongoing but there have been signs that the union is becoming more willing to openly discuss the issue of gender. Initially, Better Work Jordan facilitated a gender audit of the union, which was met with some resistance from the union. In the year since however, the union leadership has shown an increased willingness to address the issue of gender inequality evidenced in the new provisions in the latest Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

Programme and Stakeholder Activities

Traditionally, many aspects of the Better Work Jordan programme have addressed gender and other intersecting forms of discrimination. The gender strategy brings these activities together in new ways, while also proposing different activities

and engagement to fill in the gaps in existing programming. The following are some examples of key activities and accomplishments in addressing the four pillars of the gender strategy that go above and beyond the typical activities of the programme.

No Discrimination

Better Work Jordan's approach to tackling discrimination in factories is to focus on the practices and policies of employers so that the environment is in place for longer-lasting behavioural change to

ensure that all factories are free of discrimination. In a major milestone for the sector, the CBA negotiated in 2019 between the union and employer representatives includes concrete, anti-discrimination language and

a mandate for employers to tackle discrimination, including gender-based violence. This CBA requires that factories take the necessary steps and adopt policies that ensure protection from violence, harassment and discrimination in the workplace. During this process, both parties used the language and information in ILO Convention 190, which gives the CBA additional force, relevance and accuracy. Since then, the Better Work Jordan programme has worked to ensure that all factory bylaws follow the CBA. Another significant achievement in the CBA was that pregnancy tests at any stage of the migration process are now cited as non-compliant by Better Work and the CBA changed the guidance on citing non-compliance for recruitment fees (see Data Snapshot).

The tripartite stakeholders have been key to the progress achieved thus far. In particular, the union and employers embraced several forward-thinking and

compelling concepts in the CBA negotiations. Moving forward to the implementation and enforcement of the CBA, the Ministry of Labour has been a crucial partner during the assessment and advisory visits to the factories. Looking forward, this partnership means that the achievements reached for reducing discrimination will be carried through sustainably.

However, while there have been significant achievements in the last year to improving policies, it remains an open question if these policies will actually lead to an elimination of discrimination. To achieve this goal, Better Work also engages with stakeholders through different channels, such as in the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training, which includes a new section on gender norms, and through Supervisory Skills Training (SST). With Covid-19, SST sessions are now virtual and include a new component on sexual harassment and discrimination.

Paid Work and Care

Better Work Jordan aims to make improvements in paid work and care by increasing awareness of mental and physical health and wellbeing, and improving access to health services. In the last year, the BWJ programme and national stakeholders have focused explicitly on mental health, particularly of migrant workers, and this component of health has been covered in key programme activities with plans for further involvement in the future. This work has been a major breakthrough, as the topic of mental health was initially taboo among stakeholders but is now acknowledged as an issue that needs to be addressed. Intersectionality has been front and center in understanding the mental wellbeing needs of workers. In particular, migrant workers face the double challenge of being far away from home and not having resources available in Jordan in their languages. In

addition, women workers face specific challenges in the workplace, such as discrimination or sexual harassment, and with balancing unpaid care work with their jobs.

Progress has also been made on other aspects of paid work and care despite delays in some specific activities. For instance, more factories are now offering day-care centres to their workers, and a recent change in regulation ensures that these day-care centres are available on a gender-neutral basis, by taking into account the children of both male and female working parents. In addition, Better Work has encouraged employers to include health information in pre-departure training for migrant workers but these efforts are on hold because of Covid-19.

Voice and Representation

BWJ aims to strengthen the voices and representation of women in social dialogue at several levels, including on the factory floor, in labour management committee meetings, and within the trade union. So far, the trade union has been the main vehicle and implementing partner through which these issues are addressed. This partnership is critical as the union is the official representation for workers at the sectoral level, and plays a crucial role at the factory level in advocating on behalf of workers. One key achievement from a gender lens was the most participatory CBA process to-date, which included consultations with workers, with a particular focus on migrants and women. In addition, several union organizers from Bangladesh now work with the union to liaise with migrant workers who are underrepresented in the union (per Jordanian law, migrant workers are barred from union leadership). While the union has played a critical role in achieving this objective, progress on some of the specific activities with the union have been delayed.

Besides the union, there are several important avenues through which workers can engage with

management and voice their concerns. Better Work engages directly with workers through trainings on rights and responsibilities – these can be further expanded to complement the work of the union and to fill in gaps. At a basic level, Better Work seeks to ensure that as many workers as possible are represented in these committees. For instance, there are specific guidelines for the representation of women and men in union-management committees. While no such rules exist for the Occupational Safety and Health committees, Better Work advisors have recently raised this issue with factories and have encouraged them to seek input from diverse voices in their committees, including along gender, nationality and ability dimensions. However, numerical representation is just a start – it is equally important to ensure that all workers feel comfortable voicing their opinions in these meetings and are listened to with respect. The workers' centre also provides workers with a communal space to gather and the programming of the centre emphasizes the needs of migrant workers beyond the workplace.

Leadership and Skill Development

BWJ seeks to enhance the potential of women working in the garment sector and increase their retention in the industry and progression up the career ladder. The Better Work programme conducts some trainings for workers that fall into this category, and partnered with the Gap P.A.C.E. programme in 2018 and 2019 to deliver in-depth soft skills training to women workers and with the IFC in 2018 on a project to increase productivity in satellite units. Better Work also conducts training for supervisors and workers who show potential to be supervisors to increase their soft skills.

Looking forward, the garment sector strategy, which is currently under development and consultation with national stakeholders, will be an important source

of collaboration among stakeholders on the topics of leadership and skill development. The strategy focuses on the employment and retention of Jordanian workers (the vast majority of whom are women) and places a particular emphasis on skill development. As a first step in implementing the sector strategy, the ILO will contract a consultant to develop a list of job descriptions for middle management positions in garment factories, which will formalize the hiring process, better publicize these jobs in an equitable way, and help prevent gendered pay discrimination. In the future, BWJ will need to increase programming and capacity internally, or will need to partner with organizations that specialize in leadership and skill development, to fulfil this part of the gender strategy.

Data snapshot

The Better Work Jordan gender strategy focuses on supporting women and men in four issue areas: discrimination, paid work and care, voice and representation, and leadership and skills development.

1. Discrimination

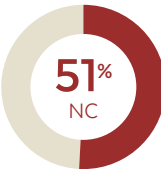
Discrimination can occur during recruitment and hiring, on the factory floor, and in the personal lives of workers. Better Work Jordan monitors many factory activities that have the potential to be discriminatory. Some forms of discrimination are easier to catch (such as requirements for pregnancy tests), whereas other forms of discrimination are much more difficult to determine and prove (such as sexual harassment).

Discrimination

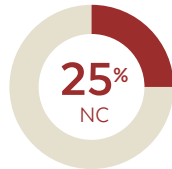
on the basis of sex occurs often in the recruitment of migrant workers:



Pregnancy tests



Recruitment fees

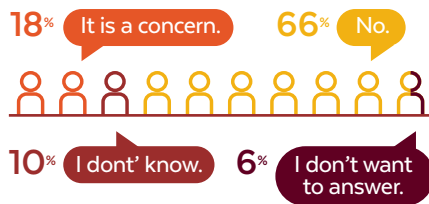


Sexual harassment

occurs in garment factories in Jordan, but it is underreported in non-compliance data and is very difficult to catch. In 2019, no factories were cited as non-compliant, but in anonymous surveys 1 in 5 workers indicated that sexual harassment is a concern for them or their co-workers.



Anonymous surveys: Workers say...



3. Voice and Representation

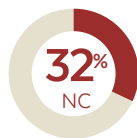
As per the CBA, the composition of women and men in the worker-management committees is reflective of their composition in the factory. While assuring balanced representation is an important start, continuous work is needed to translate this to equitable voice and effective representation.

Bipartite committee

Workers: Women 478 (68%), men 227 (32%)

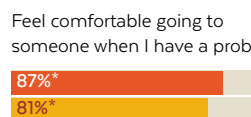
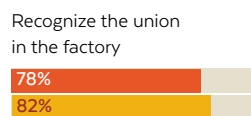
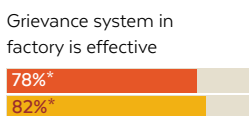


Managers: Women 117 (34%), men 226 (66%)



Factory has effective committee

Worker opinions



Women Men

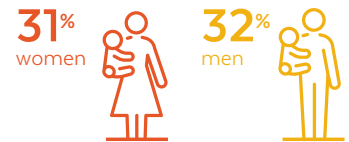
2. Paid Work and Care

All workers balance paid work outside the home and unpaid care work, but the responsibility of unpaid care work most often falls on women. Workplaces can counteract this by providing support for all working parents and by supporting the wellbeing needs of workers both in the workplace and beyond.

Adequate day-care facilities

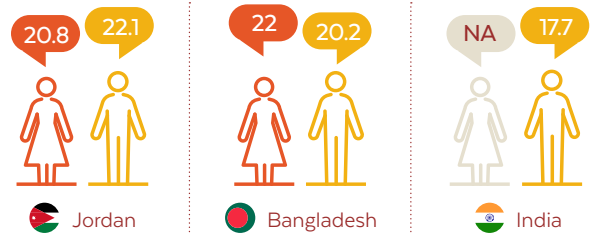


Percent of Jordanian workers who have children



Mental wellbeing. The Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) measures wellbeing with a set of seven questions that are aggregated to form a wellbeing score from 7 (lowest possible wellbeing) to 35 (highest possible wellbeing). There is significant variation in average wellbeing among nationalities and between men and women, which shows that the issue of wellbeing needs to be understood and addressed through an intersectional lens.

WEMWBS by gender and nationality



4. Leadership and Skills

While the vast majority of workers are women, most supervisors are men and there are limited opportunities for advancement. However, workers indicate that they have learned new skills at work and they believe these skills will allow them to find new jobs.

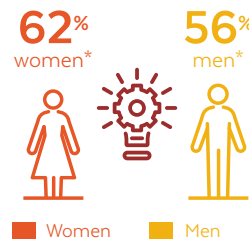
Number of workers:

Women 53,733 (73%) Men 19,475 (27%)

Number of supervisors:

Women 1,253 (33%) Men 2,519 (67%)

Learned new skills in the last year



Better Work determines non-compliance with national labour laws and international labour standards during unannounced visits to factories. Non-compliance data is from 81 assessments completed in 2019. Throughout the year, Better Work also gathers administrative data from factories, including the number and gender composition of workers, supervisors and representatives to the bipartite committee. Specific information on workers and their opinions is from a representative sample of over 5,000 workers surveyed since June 2019. Statistically significant differences between the responses of women and men are marked with an asterisk (*).

4 Covid-19 and Gender

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the garment sector in Jordan, as it has through most of the world. The Jordanian government mandated strict lockdown rules during the months of March, April and May, which halted and slowed down activities in the sector for some time, and made it impossible for Better Work and national stakeholders to deliver services in person.

Throughout the summer, the caseload in Jordan was very low and the government eased business and community restrictions. However, since September, cases of Covid-19 have been on the rise and workers in several factories have been infected. All stakeholders are working closely together to control the spread of Covid-19 across the sector and to ensure that workers are safe, healthy and provided with medical care as needed.

Many aspects of the BWJ programme were adapted to be remote, but with new and unusual pressures in the sector, many services also had to be adapted to the new reality of the most urgent needs at the time. Some activities that contribute to the gender strategy, particularly joint efforts with the union and policy-advocacy work, were delayed due to other priorities during the response to Covid-19.

Despite these temporary delays, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that achieving gender equality is more important now than ever. Covid-19 has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable, and the pandemic has been difficult for Jordanian and migrant workers for different reasons. For Jordanian workers, who are overwhelmingly women, it has been difficult to return to work, either because of restrictions from the factory or because of family concerns that working in a factory setting is not safe. Adding to this,

many day-care centres shut down as a result of the government restrictions so women workers had to rely on family for childcare. While many of the day-care centres re-opened in the summer, this showcases the importance of continuing to expand the day-care centre support system.

For migrant workers, temporary factory shutdowns meant that they spent weeks in the factory dormitories with little to do. Since production restarted in April, factories have cut back production and reduced the availability of overtime work which is a key source of income for migrant workers. Evidence from surveys of workers over the last year shows that, of those workers who kept their jobs in the factories, migrant workers have borne the brunt of the burden from Covid-19 with their hours of work per week reduced by 8 hours on average with pay down by 16 JD per month on average. In contrast, there was no statistically significant difference in the hours or pay of Jordanian workers in comparison with the survey data from last year. The recent outbreaks of Covid-19 in garment factories have disproportionately impacted migrant workers with large clusters observed in dorms where the crowded situation makes it difficult to stop the spread of the virus once one worker is infected.

5 Looking Forward

More work needs to be done in the coming two years by Better Work Jordan and key stakeholders to continue moving the garment sector in Jordan towards a more gender-equitable future. The work of the last year has been a significant start, and the engagement of stakeholders throughout the development of the gender strategy and in implementing activities increases the sustainability of the positive changes that are being made.

Going forward, both Better Work Jordan and stakeholders need further internal reflection and follow-up to ensure that all staff are aware of gender goals and that all activities are gender-sensitive. In terms of expanding the engagement beyond the programme, more work remains to be done with the tripartite stakeholders:

- ♦ **The Ministry of Labour:** At both the policy level and the enforcement level, the government needs to continue prioritizing gender equality. From a policy standpoint, the employment of Jordanian women is of particular interest to the Ministry of Labour and the government can support employers and workers through the sector strategy to make this a reality. From the enforcement side, Better Work Jordan will continue to engage with inspectors from the Ministry of Labour to ensure that a gender lens is embedded in compliance assessments.
- ♦ **The Union:** The union is critical for ensuring all workers voices are heard and represented. As the primary voice for workers at the sectoral level and as a key mediator at the factory level, it is

particularly important that the union is reflective of gender and supportive of the needs and agency of all workers.

- ♦ **Employers:** Employers play a key role by ensuring that their factories have good working conditions for both men and women, and that gender-responsive policies are in place. In addition, the sector strategy envisions that employers will play a key role in training workers, which will give the predominately female workforce an opportunity to improve their skills.

In addition to the tripartite stakeholders, Better Work needs to collaborate with other actors who have specific skills in these areas to fulfil some of the activities in the gender strategy. Finally, the research agenda and future publications should take into account gender and intersectionality as an important lens for understanding the industry. Future research projects may include looking at mental health of migrant workers and women, a deeper look at violence and harassment in factories, and research on social dialogue with a gender and migration lens.

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