

ETHIOPIA

# Annual Report

Compliance Data from 2023



**BetterWork**

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## IN NUMBERS



**39408**

Workers (85%  
Female)



**38**

FDI and local  
factories  
enrolled in  
the program



**46.5%**

of the country's  
revenue from  
manufacturing  
comes from  
Textile and

## Country context

Since 2020, the apparel sector in Ethiopia has faced two severe shocks: the dislocations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia. The war in the Tigray Region, which started in November 2020 ended after the Ethiopian Federal Government and The Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) signed a peace agreement on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. On the other hand, in the Amhara Region, there is an ongoing war between the federal forces and an armed militia group (Fano) leading to severe conflict and instability. In August 2023, the Federal Government decreed a state of emergency in the region entailing curfews and restrictions on movements and gatherings. On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024, the government extended the state of emergency for an additional four months.

These conflicts have resulted in enormous loss of life and mass displacement. The conflicts have also had a direct impact on the apparel sector. Apparel factories in Tigray were closed and business in factories in Amhara Region was highly impaired. As a result of the conflicts, Ethiopia lost access to the trade privileges granted by the US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a system of trade preferences that eliminates tariffs for around 6,500 product types. Access to AGOA had allowed apparel and footwear companies in Ethiopia duty-free access to US markets. The US government terminated Ethiopia's access to AGOA on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, and its restoration is still awaited. The impact of the suspension

has been severe, resulting in the closure of factories and leading to large-scale job losses.

However, 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of Ethiopia's membership of the ILO. The anniversary was celebrated with a National Labor Conference in Addis Ababa, organized by the ILO in collaboration with its social partners. The conference commemorated Ethiopia's ILO Centenary by reflecting on the accomplishments of the ILO and its tripartite partners in advancing social dialogue, decent work, enhanced productivity, and inclusive growth. The forum prioritized the agenda of employers' and workers' affairs, fostering a collaborative platform for stakeholders in the world of work. It was attended by high-level government delegates from the Ministry of Labour and Skills, the ILO, the African Union, IGAD, the South Africa Development Community (SADC) and diplomatic missions.



## Impact to date



### IMPROVED MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The overall HR practice in factories is improving. During the first cycle of assessments (2019), verbal harassment was a commonly indicated issue in factories, which has improved significantly. Enterprise Advisors (EAs) assigned by the programme for each factory, through advisory sessions, have been able to share with management international best practices based on labour standards and improve existing HR documents/systems, or provide templates when these do not exist. Practical changes have been observed in age verification, gender discrimination during hiring, pension calculation, and risk assessment.



### DISABILITY INCLUSION

The ONEILO/SIRAYE is collaborating with the ECDD (Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development) and the Ethiopian Business Disability Network (EBDN) to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in industrial parks (IP) by strengthening the capacities of factories and park-level actors. A total of 31 factories have received support since September 2023. Disability inclusion awareness training programmes have been conducted for factory managers and different actors to promote inclusive employment. Sixteen disability accessibility audits were conducted for selected factories within the industrial parks to understand gaps. The factories will be supported in developing and revising HR policies, and strategies to promote and facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Factories will be matched with job seekers for employment and internship opportunities.



## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Better Work Ethiopia (BWE) recognizes the importance of strong worker representation and constructive dialogue in fostering a just and equitable work environment. In 2023, the programme supported the establishment of ten new basic unions with 12,225 members, which contributed to strengthening worker representation and voice. Of the total membership, 85 per cent are female workers, showcasing a substantial contribution to female empowerment and gender balance in the workforce. In addition, 50 per cent of the elected leaders within the organized unions are female, further promoting gender diversity and leadership opportunities for women. Training was provided to the newly elected leaders to build their capacity for effective negotiation and dispute resolution, and tailored training programs on collective bargaining and negotiation were conducted for various stakeholders, along with experience-sharing workshops to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among unions.

To build capacity for effective negotiation and dispute resolution, tailored training on collective bargaining and negotiation was conducted for various stakeholders, as well as experience-sharing workshops to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration among unions. Additionally, collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Skills (MOLS) resulted in the development of comprehensive guidelines on key topics, such as collective bargaining and dispute resolution mechanisms. Moreover, trainings were conducted for labour relations boards, conciliators, and judges.

## WORKERS' EMPOWERMENT AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Better Work Ethiopia is fostering workers' empowerment and a well-being agenda from different perspectives. The core services delivered at the factory level emphasize creating an enabling environment for social dialogue and workers' engagement. The trainings offered are geared towards workers' empowerment, with a special focus on gender equality. Out of the 52 trainings delivered in 2023, 21 of them promote gender equality and workers'

empowerment. Through the advisory sessions, factories are supported to have an effective system to prevent disputes and handle grievances effectively.

At the sectoral and industry park level, Better Work Ethiopia is collaborating with actors, including workers' organizations, investors' associations, and the government to create an enabling environment for workers' voice and representation; and for a better-coordinated remediation system.

The programme partnered with the Ethiopian Investment Commission and other park-level actors, including workers' organizations, to establish workers' call centers at Hawassa and Bole Lemi Industrial parks for workers to lodge their complaints if they are not comfortable with the existing grievance mechanism at the factory level. Better Work Ethiopia is also collaborating with Hawassa University, to strengthen integrated labour rights and advocacy work, focusing on free legal aid provision, providing representation services for workers in the park, and advisory services to employers. In 2023, two new legal aid centers were established in Hawassa, increasing the number to three. The centers handled 472 cases, covering labour and family disputes, all provided free of charge. With 17 engaged students, including 15 paralegals and 2 language translators, the centers serve as valuable platforms for both legal aid and student education. The cost savings from providing these services for free amount to approximately 7,080,000 Ethiopian Birr, or about USD 129,000. Based on the learning from HU, the programme supported Bahirdar University in establishing a legal aid center to serve workers in Bahir Dar areas.



## **POLICY ADVOCACY AND LABOUR POLICY**

### **MINIMUM WAGE**

The ILO conducted a study on wage earners in Ethiopia. The study aims to fill the information gap and contribute to the evidence-based minimum wage setting in the country.

The programme, in collaboration with FES, organized a learning visit to Vietnam for key stakeholders, who will play a key role in wage setting in Ethiopia. Ethiopian delegates were from the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) House of Peoples Representatives, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning, the Ethiopian



Investment Commission, Civil Service Commission, the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU), the Confederation of Ethiopian Employers Federation (CEEF), and the Confederation of Ethiopian Employers Association (CEEA). The visit helped the delegates understand how the country sets evidence-based minimum wage systems in a consultative manner and how it also improved productivity. The delegates had extensive interactions with the Vietnamese government and social partners and developed an understanding of the labour policy and legislation that underpins tripartism, social dialogue, and wage-setting. The interaction with key stakeholders helped the Ethiopian delegation to develop a practical understanding of the nature, composition, and operations of national-level wage-setting institutions, and how the country minimizes the potential risks of minimum wage (MW) introduction and improves productivity.

### **OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE LIST**

Better Work Ethiopia is making notable progress in supporting legal reforms to ensure a safe and healthy work environment to improve workers' well-being and enterprise productivity.

The programme, under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Skills, facilitated the revision of Ethiopia's Occupational Disease list and developed detailed disability assessment criteria. In addition, the programme supported the revision of the Occupational Safety and Health Directive of Ethiopia. Once the two documents are approved, it is expected to be a game changer in the OSH landscape in Ethiopia.

In addition, in collaboration with regional bureaus of labour, the programme enhances OSH service provision by training high-risk enterprises, equipping government inspectors, and offering specialized training programmes. Addressing worker safety beyond factory walls, Better Work Ethiopia conducts assessments and workshops to improve commuting safety. Additionally, it fosters a culture of safety through national OSH Day celebrations and plans to establish a dedicated OSH institute.



## Our Approach

Better Work Ethiopia has been implemented since 2019 in the framework of an ILO programme called 'Advancing Decent Work and Inclusive Industrialization in Ethiopia,' or 'ONEILO-SIRAYE'. It operates at the national, regional, and factory levels, involving different ILO departments and key global programmes, namely SCORE, Vision Zero Fund (VZF), LABADMIN, and INWORK, to address the main challenges in advancing decent work in Ethiopia as one programme. Moreover, gender considerations are mainstreamed across these components to deliver effective and need-based services. In many countries, Better Work, SCORE, INWORK, and VZF operate in parallel. However, in Ethiopia, the programmes and departments are aligning their service packages and developing a new service model that brings the specializations of each programme to address the unique needs of the garment and textile industry in the country.

During the reporting period, the programme continued to face unprecedented challenges due to political and civil conflict in Ethiopia and businesses suffered due to AGOA suspension resulting from the conflicts. Several factories closed and downsized. Better Work Ethiopia was unable to provide its services to factories in the Tigray and Amhara regions. Despite the challenges, Better Work continued contributing to national development priorities through key programme interventions. Better Work helped factories to improve compliance with

international labour standards/national labour law, creating an enabling environment for higher productivity, improved competitiveness, gender equality, and better working conditions. Informed by assessment and other relevant ILO tools, it provided policy advice, technical support, and coaching, convened working conditions in the garment and textile sector and new sectors.

In the reporting period, the programme included new sectors, such as leather, and footwear, and expanded its services to more locally owned factories. It delivered core services to 38 active factories reaching 39,408 workers (85% female). A total of 29 assessments and 191 advisory sessions were conducted to support factories in identifying areas for improvement and mitigating them by setting up and strengthening OSH and HR management systems, and through social dialogue. The capacity of 1379 (870 of whom were female) top and middle-level managers, supervisors, and workers was strengthened through training, peer-to-peer learning, and coaching.

## FIVE INITIATIVES TOGETHER TO ENSURE BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS

1. Better Work has more than a decade of experience in advancing working conditions and competitiveness in the global garment industry.
2. SCORE is an ILO's modular training and in-factory coaching programme, which teaches quality management, efficient use of resources and industrial engineering concepts to boost enterprise productivity.
3. The Vision Zero Fund (VZF) was founded by the Group of Seven (G7) countries and aims to prevent work-related deaths, injuries, and diseases across the global supply chain.
4. LAB ADMIN/OSH BRANCH supports the strengthening of labour administration in building more effective inspection systems and enhancing the capacity of the labour inspectorate in strategic compliance planning and implementation
5. Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations, and Working Conditions Branch (INWORK) provides technical assistance to ILO constituents and expands their knowledge on issues related to wages, working hours, workplace conditions, collective bargaining, and contracts.

## Compliance Overview

Better Work Ethiopia provides its core services to registered factories for a full cycle of one year. The factories are composed of local and foreign direct investment (FDI) factories across the country. After registration, factories receive an initial advisory for the first 100 days. An unannounced assessment is then conducted, and a report is released within one month on the Better Work (BW) portal system. Based on the assessment findings, each factory, with the support of a BW Enterprise Advisor, works on the development of an Improvement Plan (IP) and remediation, throughout the remaining months. Depending on the factory's needs and the issues identified, tailored training programmes and seminars are delivered. BW develops a Progress Report towards the end of a cycle (11<sup>th</sup> month), where the achievements and challenges of a factory during the year are captured.

## Coverage and Methodology

The assessments evaluate over 250 questions or issues related to eight topics (listed below) on international and national labour regulations. The assessments are unannounced and conducted in person.

International Labour Standard	National Labour Standard
Child labour	Compensation
Discrimination	Contract and Human Resource
Forced Labour	Working time
Freedom of association and collective Bargaining	
Occupational Safety and Health	

## NON-COMPLIANCE RATES BY COMPLIANCE POINT - JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023

Category	Sub-category	Jan 2023	Dec 2023
Child Labour	Child Labourers	0%	100%
	Documentation and Protection of Young...	4%	96%
	Hazardous Work and other Worst Forms	0%	100%
Discrimination	Gender	11%	89%
	Other Grounds	0%	100%
	Race and Origin	0%	100%
	Religion and Political Opinion	0%	100%
Forced Labour	Bonded Labour	0%	100%
	Coercion	4%	96%
	Forced Labour and Overtime	7%	93%
	Prison Labour	0%	100%
Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	Collective Bargaining	7%	93%
	Freedom to Associate	0%	100%
	Interference and Discrimination	4%	96%
	Strikes	0%	100%
	Union Operations	0%	100%
Compensation	Method of Payment	4%	96%
	Minimum Wages/Piece Rate Wages	0%	100%
	Overtime Wages	0%	100%
	Paid Leave	0%	100%
	Premium Pay	0%	100%
	Social Security and Other Benefits	21%	79%
	Wage Information, Use and Deduction	7%	93%
Contracts and Human Resources	Contracting Procedures	11%	89%
	Dialogue, Discipline and Disputes	25%	75%
	Employment Contracts	29%	71%
	Termination	4%	96%
Occupational Safety and Health	Chemicals and Hazardous Substances	21%	79%
	Emergency Preparedness	0%	100%
	Health Services and First Aid	71%	29%
	OSH Management Systems	54%	46%
	Welfare Facilities	71%	29%
	Worker Accommodation	0%	100%
	Worker Protection	89%	11%
Working Time	Leave	32%	68%
	Overtime	50%	50%
	Regular Hours	46%	54%

## Detailed findings

In 2023, the programme conducted 28 regular unannounced factory assessments to check the performance of factories in meeting national and international labour standards. As a result of the assessment, Better Work Ethiopia was able to identify compliance issues and support the factories in addressing them. In addition, the assessment also revealed non-compliance issues that were beyond the control of the factories, which needed to be addressed by industry parks and national-level authorities. This eventually led to improved compliance in the sector.

### CORE LABOUR STANDARDS

The clusters on discrimination, child labour, freedom of association, and forced labour are based on international labour standards. For Ethiopia, since the core ILO Conventions are ratified and considered part of the country's laws, the application is like that of the other clusters. As indicated in the table below, issues related to these clusters account for a very low share. This could relate to the inadequate development of unionization in factories, especially in the FOA and CB clusters.

The registered factories are formal industries that do not hire workers under the age of 18; there has been no child labour indicated in the assessments so far. However, there were areas of improvement required in terms of proper age verification during recruitment. The factories have significantly improved their systems and now require different documents, such as certificates of national examination, in addition to a national ID. Furthermore, factories have significantly improved on gender referencing in job announcements, which used to be a common practice.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC rate
Child Labour	Child Labourers	0%
	Documentation and Protection of Young Workers	4%
	Hazardous Work and Other Worst Forms	0%
Discrimination	Gender	11%
	Other Grounds	0%
	Race and Origin	0%
	Religion and Political Opinion	0%
Forced Labour	Bonded Labour	0%
	Coercion	4%
	Forced Labour and Overtime	7%
	Prison Labour	0%
	Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	0%
Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	Collective Bargaining	7%
	Freedom to Associate	0%
	Interference and Discrimination	4%
	Strikes	0%

	Union Operations	0%
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## NATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS

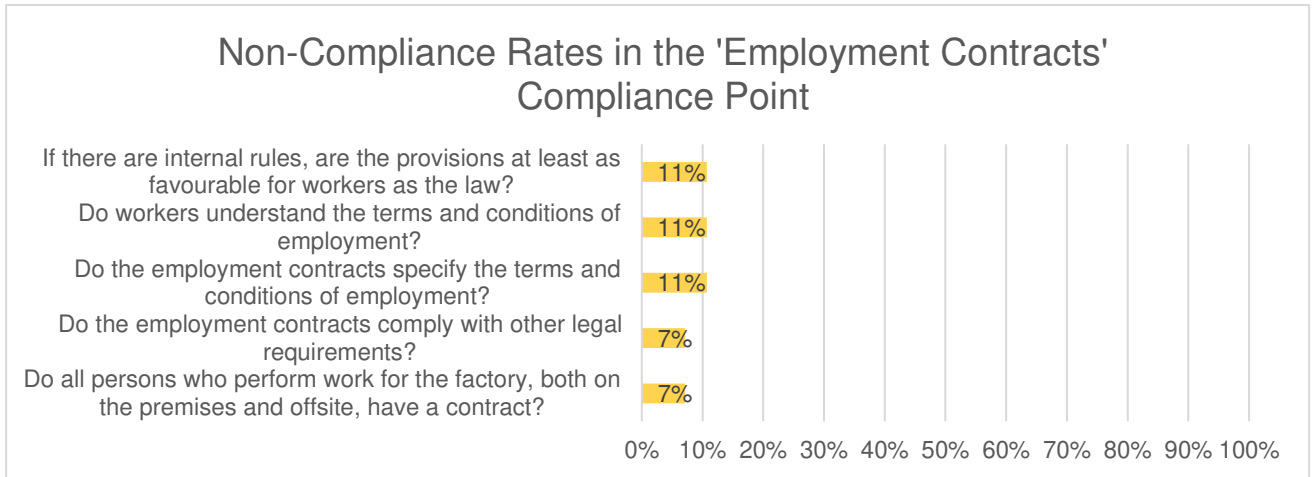
### CONTRACTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Better Work focuses on strengthening the management systems of factories as these drive sustainable change. The programme provided advisory services and training to address the gaps. As a result, improvements were observed in the HR management systems in factories.

In most of the factories, in the first assessment, issues concerning the absence of contracts for workers/contracts available in the language the workers do not understand/, lack of accurate payroll records, verbal abuse, and limited knowledge of workers on wage information, policies, and procedures, were common. Currently, most factories provide inductions during entry; provide appropriate contracts that are understandable to workers (translated into local languages); have improved their payroll system and recruitment procedures and provide pay slips. In addition, factories are improving their grievance handling, as well as disciplinary and termination procedures.

The average compliance of this cluster in 2022 was 95 per cent. The current year's average compliance level slightly declined to 93 per cent. This is because several new local factories that joined the programme recently were assessed for the first time, and issues that arose in the first assessments were recorded.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC Rate
Contracts and Human Resources	Contracting Procedures	11%
	Dialogue, Discipline and Disputes	25%
	Employment Contracts	29%
	Termination	4%



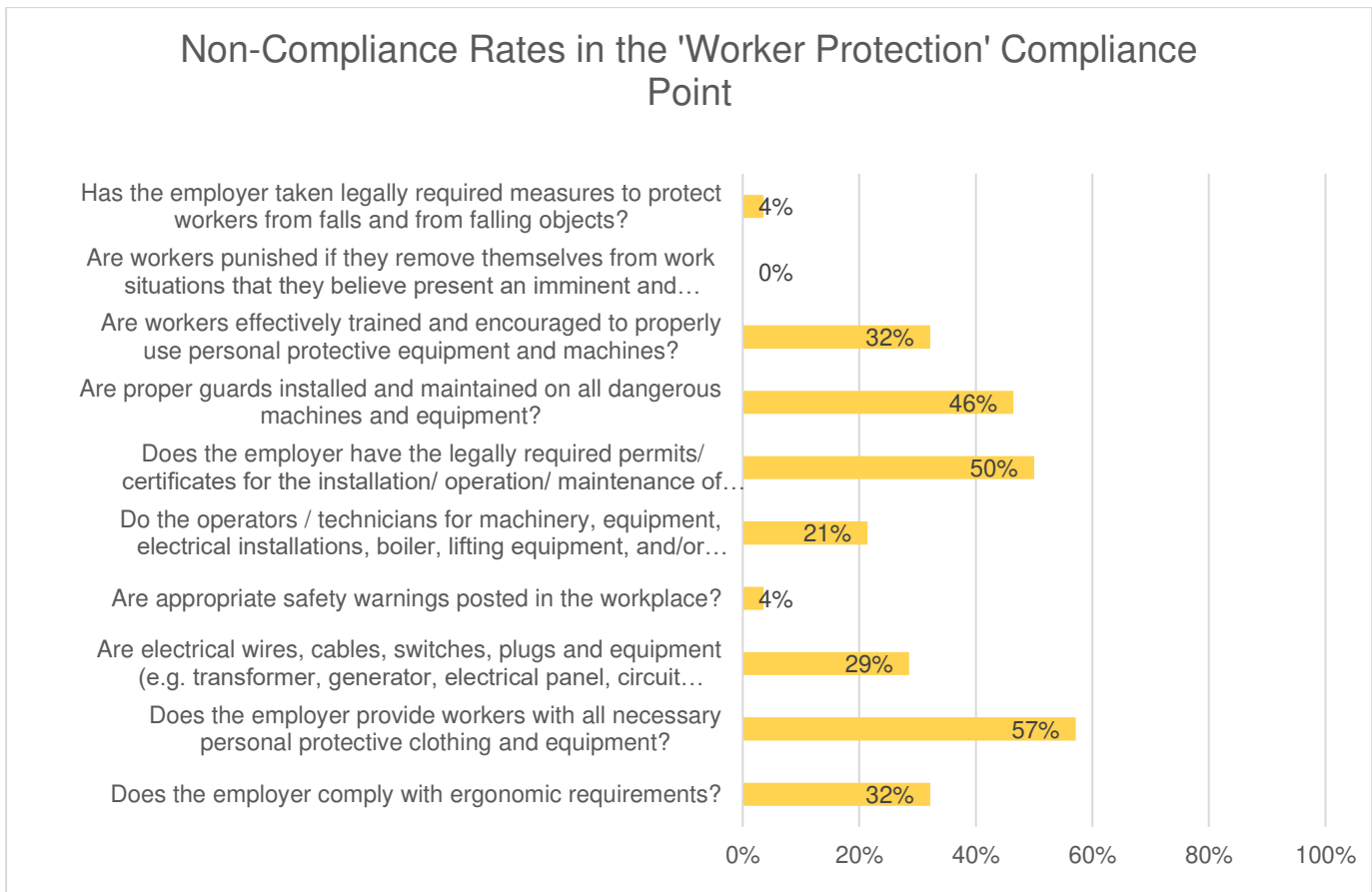
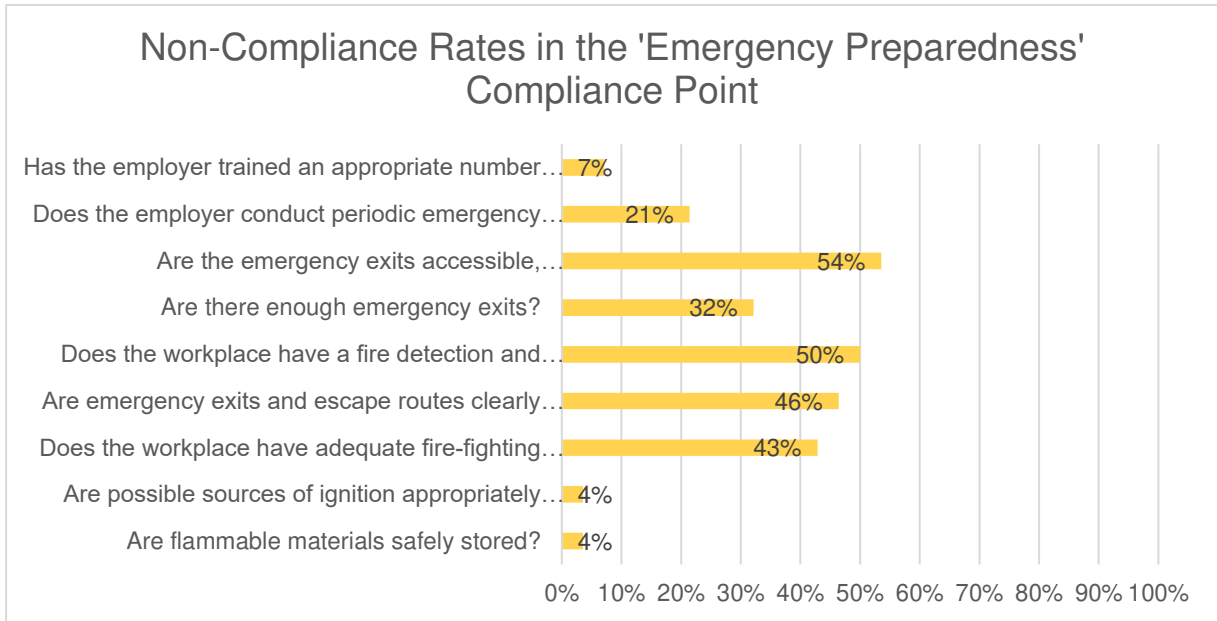
### OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH)

Since the programme's inception, it has been observed that most factories are not fulfilling their OSH legal obligations. Out of the non-compliances cited in the 28 assessments conducted in 2023, about 59 per cent of the findings related to OSH issues. This figure showed an improvement of 13 per cent from 2022.

In general, over the course of Better Work Ethiopia’s interventions, factories’ attitudes/outlooks changed from a quick-fix mentality towards seeking sustainable change, hence the improvement of OSH management systems. In addition, factories are demonstrating improvement in their OSH practices.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC rate
Occupational Safety and Health	Chemicals and Hazardous Substances	21%
	Emergency Preparedness	100%
	Health Services and First Aid	71%
	OSH Management Systems	54%
	Welfare Facilities	71%
	Worker Accommodation	0%
	Worker Protection	89%
	Working Environment	18%

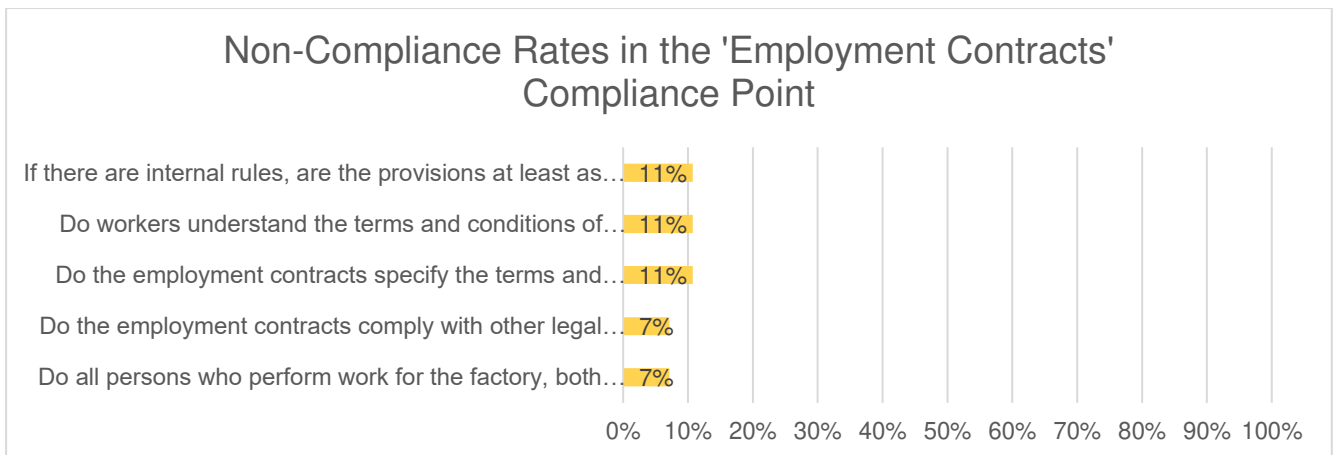




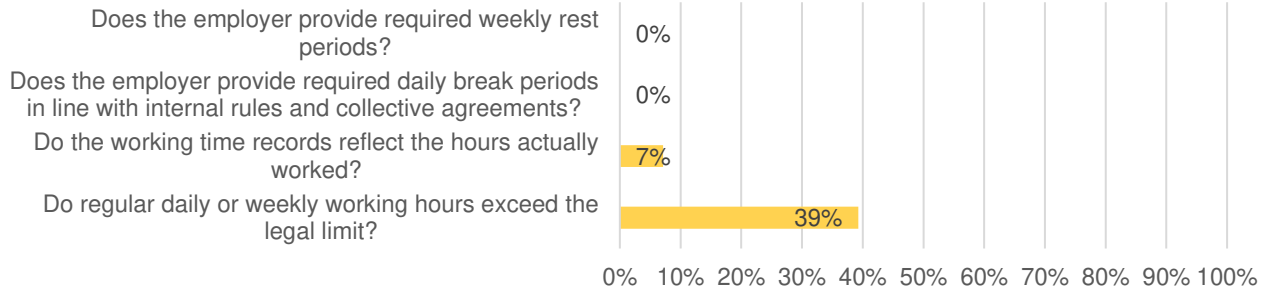
### WORKING TIME AND COMPENSATION

At the start of the programme, awareness of the requirements of the law was very low, and factories were adhering more to their internal HR rules and procedures than the labour law requirements. Issues like excessive overtime, going beyond the working hour arrangements, and not providing necessary compensatory rest days for work at weekends, were indicated frequently. With continuous advisory, training, and seminars, and the factories’ efforts, the occurrence of these issues is declining moderately. Factories that do have trade unions are also engaging in consultation with unions in terms of rearranging weekly working hours. The compliance assessments conducted in 2022 show the average compliance level for working time and compensation clusters were 88 per cent and 97 per cent, respectively. In 2023, the compliance level of these two clusters amounted to 89 per cent and 97 per cent, respectively.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC Rate
Compensation	Method of Payment	4%
	Minimum Wages/Piece Rate Wages	0%
	Overtime Wages	0%
	Paid Leave	0%
	Premium Pay	0%
	Social Security and Other Benefits	21%
	Wage Information, Use and Deduction	7%
Working Time	Leave	32%
	Overtime	50%
	Regular Hours	46%



### Non-Compliance Rates in the 'Regular Hours' Compliance Point



## Empowering women to leadership positions

As part of its Gender Equality objectives and to address the challenges of under-representation of women in leadership, the SIRAYE programme has designed a Women Leadership Development intervention with the view to enhance the capacity of women workers through leadership and technical skills training and four to five months of mentorship/coaching to take up supervisory positions. So far, this intervention trained a total of 210 women factory workers. Out of which, an average of 70% were promoted to the next leadership position with salary increments.

“The training provided by ILO’s is well organized and crafted according to the needs of our workers and they have empowered them. The training and coaching have increased the efficiency of our employees and factories in most of the key performance Indicators. The company now has learned that training can empower our workers, create motivation, and help us enhance productivity which should be homework for us as factory managers to work on leadership training programs in the future.” Human Resources Manager at Silver Spark Apparel.



"There is a big difference in my attitude, behaviour and self-confidence before and after taking ILO/SIRAYE 's training and mentorship, now I conduct daily meetings with workers and motivate them to achieve their targets and get incentives. I am currently promoted to a supervisory position and got a salary increment. I now aspire to hold an executive position." Birtukan Mulatu



"I didn't have self-confidence, used to disagree with other workers and I was only focused on my own work. The training and coaching/mentorship have transformed my career and personal life as my communication skills are enhanced. I developed sense of ownership to my work and highly improved my relationship with workers. Now I have no fear of speaking up in a public and encourages young female workers to develop self-confidence and take more responsibilities." Danistu Halemo



## Looking forward

During its next strategic phase, Better Work will build on its impact to date with the following broad objectives:

### 1. ACCELERATE IMPROVEMENTS IN WORKING CONDITIONS AND BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS IN THE GARMENT SECTOR

Throughout Better Work Ethiopia interventions, factories' attitudes/outlooks changed from a quick-fix mentality towards seeking sustainable change, hence the improvement of OSH management systems. In addition, factories are demonstrating improvement in their OSH practices and, hence, in working conditions. Better Work is working towards accelerating these improvements. To this end, continuous engagement, and consultation of key stakeholders on national-level programmes are ongoing to increase ownership and commitment of the stakeholders to strengthen the changes, and to ensure sustainability.

### 2. STRENGTHEN NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS AND ENCOURAGE SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Better Work Ethiopia will continue to strengthen local and regional coordination between the labour administration and other tripartite social partners to build trust and foster regular tripartite plus social dialogue.

To this end, the programme will continue supporting enforcement mechanisms and capacities in government organizations and social partners. It will promote the coordination of basic unions at the park/regional level and more regular/structured engagement with employers/investors' associations and trade unions, respectively, on programme activities. Enforcement mechanisms and capacities in government organizations and social partners should be strengthened.

### 3. EMPOWER WOMEN and GENDER EQUALITY

As the workforce in the garment industry is predominantly young women from rural areas, most of whom are new not only to formal employment, but also to the regions or locations where they are working and living, Better Work is committed to promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the industry. It intends to scale up the Women Leadership Development Programme to support women workers progressing further in their careers.

#### 4. DISABILITY INCLUSION

Better Work Ethiopia is collaborating with the ECDD (Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development) and the Ethiopian Business Disability Network (EBDN) to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in industrial parks by strengthening the capacities of factories and park-level actors. The programme includes training, accessibility audits, and inclusive HR policy development and review elements. The piloted programme has showcased encouraging learnings. It will continue with this and other similar interventions.

#### 5. OTHER SECTORS

Better Work Ethiopia intends to take its learnings from the textile and garment sector to other sectors. Few leather and leather goods-producing factories are registered in the programme in the reporting year, and this will be further strengthened. In addition, the programme is looking forward to engaging in the coffee and horticulture sectors to enhance decent work and support enterprises and actors in the value chain with human rights due diligence requirements.

Better Work Ethiopia is supported by the following development partners :

- ▶ Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- ▶ Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)
- ▶ Germany, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
- ▶ Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- ▶ Switzerland, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
- ▶ United States, United States Department of Labor, Bureau for International Labor Affairs, Office of Trade and Labor Affairs



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