



**BetterWork**

# Global Gender Strategy

**2018-2022**



International  
Labour  
Organization



International  
Finance  
Corporation  
WORLD BANK GROUP

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**The Better Work programme, a joint initiative of the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, has been working since 2007 to improve working conditions and promote competitiveness in global garment supply chains.**

**Gender equality is a key component of Better Work. Empowering women is both the means and the end goal. This document sets out Better Work’s strategy for the promotion of gender equality and women’s economic empowerment during the programme’s Stage IV (2018-2022).**

*“Peace, prosperity and social justice depend on the achievement of substantive equality between women and men.”*

**— GUY RYDER  
ILO DIRECTOR GENERAL**

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## GLOSSARY

**Sex** refers to biological and universal physical attributes of men and women. For example, only women can give birth; only men have a prostate gland.

**Gender** refers to the socially constructed roles and opportunities associated with women, men, girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are ‘Socially constructed’ (as opposed to being biologically determined) and learned through social norms, as well as being context and time-specific and changeable. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them.

**Gender-based violence and harassment**, in this strategy, is used as an umbrella term for unacceptable behaviors and practices – perpetrated against a person’s will – that stem from unequal power relationships and negative gender roles. It includes acts that are likely to result in physical, psychological, or sexual harm or suffering; threats of such acts; and coercion and other deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

**Gender equality** is defined as ‘the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of men and women and implies that the interests, priorities and needs of both are taken into consideration equally.’ Equality does not mean being the same, nor equal numbers of men and women in all activities, nor does it mean treating them in the same way. Everyone should have equal opportunities and live in a society in which men and women are able to live equally fulfilling lives.

**Gender equity** means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

**Gender mainstreaming** is defined as ‘the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action. It seeks to guarantee that the concerns and experiences of individuals of both sexes are taken into consideration in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs with the aim of achieving gender equality.’

**Gender-Neutral, Gender-Sensitive, and Gender-Transformative:** The primary objective behind gender mainstreaming is to design and implement development projects, programs and policies that:

1. do not reinforce existing gender inequalities (Gender-neutral)
2. attempt to redress existing gender inequalities (Gender-sensitive)
3. attempt to re-define women and men’s gender roles and relations (Gender-responsive/transformative)

The degree of integration of a gender perspective in any given initiative can be conceptualized as a continuum.

**Gender-neutral** initiatives use the knowledge of gender differences in a given context to target and meet the practical needs of both women and men. Gender-neutral initiatives do not disturb existing gender relations.

**Gender sensitivity** is the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions. Gender-sensitive initiatives address gender norms, roles and access to resources in so far as needed to reach project goals.

**Gender responsiveness** is the ability to be proactive, and to consistently integrate gender perspectives. In addition it aims to include gender equality, women’s empowerment and men and a masculine lens. Gender responsiveness changes gender norms, roles and access to resources as a key component of initiatives.

**Gender-transformative** initiatives transform the existing distribution of resources and responsibilities in order to create a more equal relationship between women and men. Women and men may be targeted or one group alone may be targeted by the intervention.



# 1 Why a Global Gender Strategy?

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**The global garment industry has the potential to lift millions of women and men out of poverty worldwide, and can advance gender equality. This will only happen if decent, good quality jobs are available. Our research has demonstrated that when all workers, men and women, are treated fairly and have decent jobs, everyone benefits: the workers themselves, their employers, the industry, and the local and national economies. Good quality jobs catalyze women's economic empowerment, offer social protection and measures to balance work and family, and operate in an environment free from discrimination and harassment. The absence of these conditions impedes women's access to decent jobs.**

Women workers make up the vast majority of the workforce in the global garment industry, and represent 79 per cent of workers in factories engaged in the Better Work programme. They tend to be employed in low-skilled, low-value occupations such as sewing machine operators and helpers in the production process, whereas men are more likely to be employed in higher wage occupations and in leadership positions. Because of negative cultural and gender norms, recruitment and employment in the garment industry is rife with gender discrimination, against both women and men. Women workers are often subjected to sexual harassment during recruitment and in the workplace, and they are discriminated against when it comes to wages, conditions of work, benefits (including maternity protection and threat of dismissal upon disclosure of pregnancy status) and promotion.

Better Work is committed to working with partners to address these challenges, helping ensure quality jobs in the global garment industry helping advance gender equality and realize the development potential that these jobs hold.

During the implementation of its 2018–2022 strategy, Better Work will build on its extensive experience and understanding of what drives change in supply chains to significantly scale up its impact. In doing so, Better Work is particularly well-positioned to promote inclusive growth and women's economic empowerment.

While addressing gender issues has always been a component of Better Work, our recent impact assessment<sup>1</sup> showed that empowering women is not only a key outcome of the programme, but is also critical for the achievement of our overall objectives. When all workers, men and women, are treated fairly and have decent jobs, everyone benefits: the workers themselves, their employers, the industry, and the local and national economies. As a result, Better Work is renewing its strategic focus on gender equality and women's economic empowerment by putting women centre stage in all aspects of our work.



ITUC-AP  
International Trade Union Confederation  
Asia Pacific Region

# ITUC-AP Gender Equality and Pay Equity Verification Manual

*A Trade Union Guide on Participatory Gender Audit*





# 2 Gender Equality as a Key Development Policy Priority

**This Global Gender Strategy builds on the ILO’s regulatory framework, the normative and development policy framework of the United Nations, and the World Bank’s and IFC’s policy that investing in women and girls is “smart economics.”**

## 2.1 The ILO’s International Labour Standards

Gender equality is enshrined in the ILO’s core labour standards by means of two core Conventions:

- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)

Additional Conventions with relevance to gender equality are:

- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

The four Conventions together cover gender equality themes in the world of work, including the gender wage gap; discrimination in recruitment or treatment in employment (including workplace violence and harassment); combining work and care (including care of children and the elderly); and protection related to motherhood such as the health protection of pregnant and breastfeeding women, maternity leave, leave in case of complications, benefits and employment protection.

A fifth international labour standard, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), sets forth the right for workers and employers to establish and join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization. The Convention has a strong gender equality relevance, as the voice and representation of both female and male workers and employers is a prerequisite for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Women’s movements and organizations have traditionally played a key role in the advocacy of women’s economic, social and political rights and remain key motors of social change. Women in the trade union movement have, in addition to fair wages and working

hours, identified new issues necessitating campaigns, social dialogue and collective bargaining, including the gender wage gap, maternity protection, childcare services and sexual harassment in the workplace.

The ILO is embarking on a standard-setting process on violence and harassment that is of great relevance to this strategy. In June 2018, the International Labour Conference will have a first discussion on the form and content of a possible standard or standards on “violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work”. As a lead-up to this first discussion, the ILO convened a Meeting of Experts on the topic in 2016, which conceptualized gender-based violence and harassment (including sexual harassment) within an overall continuum of violence and harassment in the world of work.<sup>2</sup> This Global Gender Strategy and implementation plan will be informed by this standard-setting process, continuing up to a second discussion in 2019 and 2020, and then by the resulting new ILO standard or standards.

### THE WOMEN AT WORK INITIATIVE

The Women at Work Initiative was launched by the ILO Director-General in May 2013 as one of the organization’s seven centenary initiatives.<sup>3</sup> The initiative draws attention to the importance of gender equality by reviewing the place and conditions of women in the world of work and engaging workers, employers and governments in concrete action to realize equality of opportunity and treatment. As a result of the centenary initiative, the World of Work Summit held during the 2017 International Labour Conference focused on the future of women and work, and the ILO’s High Level Global Commission on the Future of Work will also report on the progress of gender equality in the world of work.

## 2.2 The United Nations' framework for gender equality

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This focuses on ending all forms of discrimination, ending all forms of violence, ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, and full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities for women and girls.<sup>4</sup>

With the Agenda there is a more consistent call for sex disaggregation of data across many indicators.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, there are gender equality targets in other goals, such as SDG8 – promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all and specifically target 8.5: achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value<sup>6</sup> – which is of utmost relevance to the ILO and Better Work.

### CSW, CEDAW AND “BEIJING”

The body responsible for the United Nations' development policy framework for gender equality is the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW),<sup>7</sup> a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established in 1946. The CSW is the principal global intergovernmental structure exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The CSW 61st Session (2016) focused on “Women's economic empowerment in a changing world of work”, and its conclusions provided specific guidance to governments, social partners, the UN and civil society, giving strong recognition of the ILO and the decent work agenda.

In 1979, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>8</sup> was the first treaty that specifically focused on sex-based discrimination. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. States which ratified the Convention must ensure gender equality in their domestic legislation.

Gender equality issues have gained significant importance at the international level since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995.<sup>9</sup> The conference represented a crucial milestone in the progress of gender equality and empowerment of women, resulting in an agenda for women's empowerment at the international development policy level. Governments were the most important actors responsible for the implementation of gender-sensitive policies.

Among more recent initiatives, in 2010 UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) established the Women's Empowerment Principles,<sup>10</sup> which are a call for action to business and have been signed by over a thousand CEOs. In 2016, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, incumbent UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the first High-Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment. The Panel, comprised of representatives from government, business, academia, and civil society, produced two reports on how to improve economic outcomes for women in the context of the SDGs, including in global supply chains. The work of the Panel called for action from all stakeholders on a range of issues including eliminating legal barriers to female economic empowerment, addressing the care economy, and reducing gender pay gaps.

## 2.3 The World Bank Group and IFC’s “gender smart” solutions

The private sector is increasingly committed to reducing gaps between men and women not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it makes business sense. Investing in women is smart economics<sup>11</sup> as increased women’s labour force participation and earnings are associated with reduced poverty and faster growth. Income, employment and assets empower women, which benefits men, children and society as a whole.

For IFC, job creation in the private sector is a top priority. This means it is critical to identify “gender smart” employment solutions that generate opportunities for women while also contributing to companies’ bottom lines, productivity and growth. The SheWorks private sector partnership<sup>12</sup> (a partnership between 13 member companies and three strategic partners), launched by

the World Bank Group and led by IFC, has a practical approach: focus on the ‘how’ and encourage leading companies to ‘stretch’ themselves while exchanging their experiences with women’s employment. The most prominent commitment measures of SheWorks members are:

- ♦ Women in business leadership and management;
- ♦ Recruitment and retention of female talent in the workforce;
- ♦ Effective anti-sexual harassment mechanisms;
- ♦ Supporting women in the value chain as employees and entrepreneurs;
- ♦ Measuring and reporting progress; and
- ♦ Leadership’s public commitment to women’s employment as a smart business strategy.

### WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

As women are often in subordinate positions compared to men, many initiatives are focused on women’s empowerment. Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Women’s empowerment implies an expansion in women’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Women’s economic empowerment increases women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.<sup>13</sup>

The income workers earn and their experiences at work may have a trickle-down effect on all women, men, girls and boys in society. Having an income creates agency, which leads to empowerment. Women earning a formal income that is higher than average for low skilled jobs have a bigger say in household decisions than women without an income, and there is also research that demonstrates women’s increased political participation.<sup>14</sup>



# 3 Better Work's Focus on Gender Equality

This Global Gender Strategy sets out how Better Work will contribute to the promotion of gender equality through our work. In each area of our work – factory-level services, engagement with brands and manufacturers, research and policy influencing at the national and international levels – Better Work promotes gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Our current and future work is structured around the following gender equality themes:



#### Discrimination

Preventing sexual harassment; tackling contractual discrimination (e.g. recruitment and occupational segregation); bridging the gender wage gap



#### Paid Work & Care

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (including pregnancy related healthcare and nutrition); maternity protection; breastfeeding; childcare



#### Voice & Representation

Representation of women workers in factories' committees (including Better Work's worker – management committees) and trade unions, union federations, and employer organizations; voice in collective bargaining processes



#### Leadership & Skill Development

Career opportunities in factories (e.g. line supervisors and management positions); leadership positions in governments, trade unions and employers organizations; financial literacy and household budget planning

#### CONSIDERATIONS

Two considerations should be taken into account in our work on gender equality.

**First, bringing about change does not rest on the shoulders of women alone:** men's role in breaking barriers and stereotypes, sharing care and other responsibilities and actively supporting the voice and leadership of women in all aspects of their lives and organizations is key. To sustainably change gender inequalities in societies, the engagement of men and boys is crucial. If large numbers of men are to support and implement gender equality initiatives in Better Work, it will be necessary to speak in concrete, positive ways to their concerns, interests, hopes and problems.

**Second, we recognize that women and men are not single, homogeneous populations.** Women and men may face layers of discrimination that overlap based on their socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, disability, migration status, family responsibility and age. These different social categorizations are particularly relevant in certain Better Work country contexts and should be fully integrated in country programmes' gender strategies.



# 4 Challenges to Gender Equality in Better Work factories

**Between 1995 and 2005, the global labour force participation rate decreased from 52.4 per cent to 49.6 per cent. Worldwide, the chances for women to participate in the labour market remain almost 27 percentage points lower than those for men. While gender gaps in participation have been declining in some regions, merely having more women in the labour market is not enough. Women's lower participation rates translate into fewer employment opportunities, negatively affecting women's earning capacity and economic security. Women are more likely to be unemployed than men. Globally, youth employment remains an issue of concern, with unemployment affecting young women more than young men.<sup>15</sup>**

The global garment industry provides job opportunities to both women and men. The industry is of particular importance to women's economic empowerment as the majority of people employed in the sector are women in countries where the industry significantly contributes to the GDP. A job in the garment industry is often the first formal and paid job available to women in the labour market. Yet special attention for the promotion of gender equality is required as adverse social norms and discriminatory laws are reinforced by institutions and policies based on traditional gender roles. This continues to shape and inhibit labour market opportunities and incentives for women.

Across the countries where Better Work operates,<sup>16</sup> the day-to-day lives of women and men working in the garment industry differ significantly, reflecting the fact that gender dynamics are culturally and socially defined. Several deep-rooted challenges to gender equality continue to exist in Better Work factories, often mirroring the broader trends identified in the garment industry and more broadly in the countries where we operate.

## **DISCRIMINATION**

**Occupational segregation** Women tend to be concentrated in certain low-paying, low-skilled sectors such as the garment industry, and within it, they tend to be stuck in lower paying occupations such as sewing machine operators and helpers. Due to stereotypes regarding women's and men's aspirations, preferences and capabilities, employers' perceptions of women's and men's skills and attitudes are affected. This trend has been strengthened over the last two decades: as garment production becomes more technology-intensive, occupations become increasingly skilled and better paid, employing a higher proportion of men.

## **Gender-based discrimination upon recruitment**

Although pregnancy tests and contraceptives are rarely used as a condition for employment in Better Work countries, more subtle forms of pregnancy-based discrimination are widespread. In Cambodia and Jordan, men often face discrimination in recruitment, being put on more precarious contracts or paying substantially higher recruitment fees than women.

**Gender wage gap** The difference in pay between women and men for work of equal value is particularly linked to working mothers who often face additional care responsibilities, therefore suffering from a significantly reduced earnings capacity.

**Sexual harassment** Due to occupational segregation and incentive systems in factories, sexual harassment is widespread in the global garment industry. Due to negative cultural norms, fear on the part of victims, the lack of functional reporting mechanisms, and a tendency to view this behaviour as “normal”, sexual harassment is largely underreported. However, our confidential impact assessment surveys show that, as Better Work began operations, an average of 36 per cent of interviewed workers were concerned with sexual harassment in their factory.

#### PAID WORK AND CARE

**Working hours** Almost universally, men and women mention the “balance between work and family” as one of the top challenges that working women face.<sup>17</sup> Garment production is often characterized by long working hours and overtime, putting a burden on women’s roles as primary caregivers in their families and communities.

**Household and care work** Women all over the world continue to perform the vast majority of unpaid household and care work. On average, women carry out at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men. Women continue to work longer hours per day than men when both paid work and unpaid work are taken into consideration. Even when women are employed, they still carry out the larger share of unpaid household and care work, which limits their capacity to increase their hours in paid, formal work. If an adequate continuum of care solutions – including high quality childcare – is not available from childbirth, women are likely to drop out of the labour force or reduce their time spent in paid work.<sup>18</sup>

**Pregnancy-related healthcare** Few Better Work countries have legislation that allows women workers to access antenatal care during pregnancy without salary deductions. The frequent use of short-term contracts puts pregnant women in a vulnerable position, often missing out on maternity leave benefits. While all Better Work countries have maternity benefits enshrined in their law, only Bangladesh and Vietnam offer maternity leave beyond the 14 weeks required by ILO Convention 183. Whether or not maternity leave is paid depends on the worker’s seniority. Breastfeeding breaks are also guaranteed by the labour law, but not always paid.

#### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

**Trade Union representation** While women workers are increasingly becoming representatives at the factory level, they are still far from being equally represented. Also, leadership positions in union confederations and federations are still largely dominated by men.<sup>19</sup> This is partly due to widely-recognized gender ideologies, as well as to the reality that women are still expected to assume the majority of childcare responsibilities after they return home, discouraging them from serving as trade union representatives.

#### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

**Supervisory roles** Becoming a line leader or production supervisor remains the most realistic avenue of advancement for most female workers, since promotions to this level usually come from the sewing lines where women dominate. Relatively few women in the sector perceive gender to be a specific or deciding factor influencing their promotion chances. However, women continue to be under-represented in supervisory roles relative to their share in total employment in the sector. The root causes are pervasive gender stereotypes and differences between women’s and men’s educational attainment.



15  
“Countries, whether high or low-income, cannot  
any longer afford to lose out on the social and  
economic potential of gender equality.”  
GUY RYDER, ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL



# Facts & Figures

## from Better Work Programmes

### BANGLADESH

**55-70%**

OF WORKFORCE IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**23 years old, single, an internal migrant from a rural area and lives with her family in inadequate housing facilities close to work**

#### DISCRIMINATION

On average, women workers earn 21% less per hour than men, partially due to job segregation.

#### PAID WORK AND CARE

The average worker works roughly 11 hours a day, and carries out domestic chores such as cooking, washing and child care after work.

The majority of factories don't grant maternity leave or provide breastfeeding facilities.

#### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Across the country programmes, Bangladesh has the lowest share of female workers (37%) and management (15%) in worker-management committees.

#### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Women make up less than 10% of managerial positions in factories.

### CAMBODIA

**80%**

OF WORKFORCE IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Generally young, migrants coming from rural communities with six years of completed primary education**

#### DISCRIMINATION

When discrimination based on gender is found, most often men are discriminated against. Employers associate men with being trouble-makers and union activism. Men are frequently put on more precarious contracts than women.

#### PAID WORK AND CARE

An average Cambodian garment worker usually spends at least 11 hours a day away from home (eight hours work plus two hours overtime, plus one hour lunch break; commuting time not included), 6 days a week, putting high pressure on women's reproductive and care roles.

#### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Leadership positions in union confederations, federations and factory level unions are dominated by men.

#### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Career advancement opportunities for women are rare. The senior management in most factories is most likely male and foreign.

### HAITI

**65-70%**

OF WORKFORCE IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Between 21-35 years and is a city-dweller living with family**

#### DISCRIMINATION

Limited evidence suggests possible ageism and preference for women for the operator jobs.

#### PAID WORK AND CARE

Approximately 44% of factories fail to provide correct payment during maternity leave.

Most women workers return to work after maternity leave but find no childcare facilities or nursing/breastfeeding room available for them at the factories because childcare facilities are not required by law in Haiti.

#### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Leadership positions in the unions are predominantly male (approximately 80-90%).

#### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Despite making up the majority of the garment workforce, women make up less than 30% of supervisors or management members.

## INDONESIA

**90%**  
OF WORKFORCE  
IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Internal migrant (moving from rural to urban areas) aged between 21-53 years and has completed at least junior high school education.**

### DISCRIMINATION

Statements of maximum age and gender requirements remain common in job ads. There is also discrimination against pregnant, married or older women at the time of hiring. Sexual harassment, verbal abuse and workplace violence are ongoing problems.

### PAID WORK AND CARE

Maternity leave entitlement is relatively short (i.e. 1.5 months before giving birth and 1.5 months afterwards).

The law for paid maternity leave applies to less than a third of employed women, and in practice, not all workers who are entitled to this benefit receive it.

### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Evidence shows that women are systematically excluded from participation in labor unions.<sup>20</sup>

### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Relative to men, women workers tend to be more educated, yet they remain notably underrepresented in leadership and management positions.

## JORDAN

**70%**  
OF WORKFORCE  
IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Migrant from South or South-East Asia, aged 21-35 years old. She is unmarried, has no children and lives in a dormitory close to the factory in a Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ).**

### DISCRIMINATION

Many male garment workers report paying up to USD600 in recruitment fees, while the average fee for women workers is USD200.

### PAID WORK AND CARE

Pregnancy outside of marriage is illegal and single women workers who have children face legal consequences and societal stigma.

### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

PICCs comprise 65% women workers and 32% women managers.

### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Supervisors in migrant-dominated QIZs are typically men, while supervisors in Jordanian-dominated 'satellite units' are predominantly women.

## NICARAGUA

**50%**  
OF WORKFORCE  
IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Between 21 and 35 years old. Most live near the factory with their families who usually care for their children during the day.**

### DISCRIMINATION

Most collective bargaining agreements in the sector don't include gender issues, leaving women workers open to discrimination.

### PAID WORK AND CARE

While few factories have nursing rooms, they usually allow breastfeeding mothers to work 45 minutes to one hour less a day to accommodate their feeding schedule.

### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Worker-management committees comprise 45% women workers and 49% women managers.

### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Supervisors are predominantly male. This is partially due to women's primary caregiving role in society which means they often leave work to look after sick children or take part in their schooling activities.

## VIETNAM

**80%**  
OF WORKFORCE  
IS WOMEN



AVERAGE WOMAN GARMENT WORKER

**Poor, young migrant moving from the central & northern regions to industrialized South. Usually lives with colleagues or family in private rented accommodation near their workplaces**

### DISCRIMINATION

Official data show rare gender-based discrimination but anecdotal evidence suggests recruitment & contract discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy.

### PAID WORK AND CARE

Factories in Vietnam have high levels of compliance in the maternal & reproductive health areas.

More than 70% of factories do not meet legal requirements on overtime, especially monthly and annual limits, and almost 50% of them do not provide at least 4 days of rest per month.

### VOICE AND REPRESENTATION

Imbalance persists in terms of women's representation in the union leadership and the gender issues taken up and advocated for by the union. Only in Better Work factories, women make up almost half of trade union chairpersons.

### LEADERSHIP AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Women are under-represented in supervisory roles relative to their share in total employment.



# 5 Better Work's Approach

## 5.1 What has worked in achieving gender equality

Since its establishment, Better Work has impacted **3 million workers** across the world. Of these workers, the vast majority are young women who often migrate to start work in garment factories. Better Work has a measurable positive impact on addressing the challenges outlined above and promoting gender equality. Evidence from more than **15,000 worker** and **2,000 manager** surveys across five countries shows that since the programme's establishment:

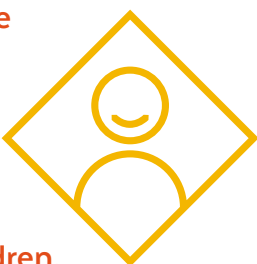
**Better Work has decreased the gender pay gap by up to 17%**, reduced sexual harassment concerns by up to 18%, and increased women's access to prenatal care by as much as 26%.



Improvements in working conditions are more significant **when women are freely elected and fairly represented** on worker - management committees.



Quality jobs for women have knock-on development impacts including **higher income, better health** for workers and their family members and **improved education** for workers' children.



Female supervisors trained by Better Work achieved a **22% increase in productivity** on their line. A workplace free of harassment also leads to higher profitability.



## 5.2 Building on success: Our vision for achieving gender equality

Better Work envisions a society where women and men have equal and decent work opportunities free from gender-based violence and harassment, as well as from discrimination, and are able to access their rights, fulfil their potential and decide on their futures.

By the end of 2022, Better Work aims to more effectively promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the global garment supply chain through our services at the factory level and by influencing and strengthening policies, institutions and practices at the national, regional and global levels.

### 5.3 The Better Work approach to change

Toward this vision, Better Work will increase its gender responsiveness through embedding gender equality themes into our factory services, our policy engagement activities, research and communication, in line with the Better Work Stage IV strategy outcomes and objectives. We will also drive gender responsiveness from within. We will strengthen our internal training and internal learning processes to champion gender equality amongst ourselves.

Better Work's planned areas of intervention for 2018-2022 directly address women's economic empowerment as a priority across all our activities. By focusing on the four gender themes – discrimination, paid work and care, voice and representation, and leadership and skill development. In our daily work, we will be able to advance the gender equality agenda while also maximizing our impact in improving working conditions as a whole in the global garment supply chain.

#### IN-FACTORY SERVICES

The heart of Better Work lies in its interactions with garment workers, employers, labour inspectors, manufacturers and brands. Better Work will advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment by addressing gender norms through our factory-level services (assessment, advisory and training). By strengthening the gender focus of our assessments, we will improve our ability to identify and deal with the wide range of gender issues in factories, including particularly sensitive topics such as workplace sexual harassment. We will continue to address non-compliances through our advisory services, ensuring visibility and fair representation of women in social dialogue. Through advisory services and training, we will continue to promote skill development and expand initiatives to build women's confidence, leadership and career opportunities.

#### TRAIN AND EMPOWER WOMEN, REDUCE SUPERVISOR HIRING COSTS

Training programmes that are directly tied to employment opportunities have proven to be particularly effective in targeting women and men entering the labour market. One such example is the IFC Work Progression & Productivity Toolkit (WPT) rolled out in Bangladesh. IFC and Better Work Bangladesh provide training for middle managers to identify, promote, and retain female supervisors and provide training for female workers at no financial cost to the factory. Workers learn how to balance lines, calculate worker efficiency and train others, resulting in the increase of internal hires.

This strategy responds to a dual need:

- First, factories are able to observe the workers in training and take less risk by promoting only when workers have sufficient skills. Workers can fill knowledge gaps before taking on the job.
- Second, women workers can be empowered to become line supervisors: since the majority of sewing section workers are women, factories are more likely to find suitable candidates for promotion by widening the pool of candidates to include women.

The early impact evaluation of the pilot programme showed that female trainees are as or more effective managers than the male trainees, but promotion rates for the female trainees are significantly lower (55%) than for male trainees (85%). There was some indication that female managers reduce worker absenteeism and increase efficiency slightly. This led to the renewed focus of women's empowerment in the design of the WPT currently being rolled out.

Sources: Worker Progression and Productivity Toolkit Brochure by IFC

Macchiavello, R. et al. (2015) "Challenges of Change: An Experiment Training Women to Manage in the Bangladeshi Garment Sector" in Warwick Economics Research Paper Series, ISSN 2059-4283 (online)

**GENDER EQUALITY THEMES**



**Discrimination**



**Paid Work & Care**



**Voice & Representation**



**Leadership & Skill Development**

**AREAS OF INTERVENTION**

**Business Practices in Global Garment Supply Chain**



**In Factory Services**



**Influencing GSC actors**

**Policy and Practice at National, Regional and Global Level**



**National level**



**Global level**

**OUTPUTS**

Awareness raising for all workers on gender equality  
 Women trained to increase career advancement opportunities  
 Women trained to play proactive roles in worker – management committees and trade unions

Partnerships with global brands and retailers to scale up initiatives for gender equality in the garment GSC

Partnerships with national stakeholders and advocacy campaign for gender responsive policies and practices

Advocacy campaign for gender responsive policies and practices, especially on gender-based violence

**OUTCOMES**

Reduced gender discrimination violations, e.g. decrease in gender wage gap and in workplace sexual harassment  
 More women in leadership positions in factories  
 More women trained and empowered to play proactive roles in trade unions and worker – management committees

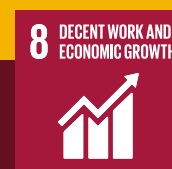
Gender-responsive policies and practices adopted in the supply chain beyond Better Work factories, incl. on care, SRHR, nutrition and pre/post-natal care  
 Global supply chain actor commitment to support national and global policy level discussions

Stronger women’s voice and representation  
 Strengthened legal frameworks to combat forms of discrimination

Evidence-based global policy making on gender equality  
 ILO standard on gender-based violence adopted

**IMPACT**

**A workplace free of discrimination, including of violence and harassment**  
**Improved health awareness and stronger agency for women workers**  
**Stronger women’s voice and representation in social dialogue mechanisms at factory, sector and national levels**  
**Women in leadership positions in factories and among tripartite constituents**



**GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN (GSC) ENGAGEMENT**

We recognize that the private sector is an important driver of women's economic empowerment and a critical contributor to other drivers through partnerships. Cultural change will come from securing leadership commitment and messaging, from embedding these principles across all levels of the business and incorporating them into the overall business strategy.

Through our factory level services, Better Work can demonstrate empirically that gender equality and women's economic empowerment are strategic drivers. Information on the prevalence of sexual harassment, the dynamics of discrimination (and career advancement) and attitudes towards maternity protection amongst other themes will allow Better Work to influence global brands and retailers to focus on women's economic empowerment and change business cultures and practices in their supply chains. Better Work is in a strong position to work with brands and manufacturers to promote gender sensitive global supply chain practices.

Due to our unique positioning in the global garment supply chain as an actor for change, Better Work is also well placed to create synergies and partnerships with other organizations at the local and global level who have particular expertise on the identified gender themes which fall beyond the core competencies of Better Work. We will forge new alliances in the supply chain to advance our objectives, especially under the theme of paid work and care.

**INFLUENCING NATIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY ON GENDER EQUALITY**

Given the significance of the garment sector in the countries where Better Work operates, the industry provides a strong entry point to build more effective national institutions, strengthen public-private partnerships and address policy gaps.

Better Work is well positioned to strengthen public institutions through partnerships with different stakeholders, including national governments, trade unions and employer organizations. Governments are primarily responsible for enforcing and strengthening laws and regulations, including through ratification of relevant ILO Conventions; this means they are uniquely situated to advance gender equality and empower women economically. Trade unions and employer organizations have a key role to play in ensuring women's voices are heard and that there is a fair representation in their constituencies and leaderships, especially in an industry with such a high female participation in the labour market. At the global level, as the ILO and the World Bank Group will strengthen collaboration on complementary policies fostering decent work and competitiveness, they will contribute to creating an enabling environment that catalyzes women's economic empowerment.

Better Work's unique research findings and data are used for awareness raising at the factory, industry and national levels, as well as for campaigns and other communications channels contributing to informing

**PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN THE BETTER WORK TEAM**

In order to be even more effective in our factory-facing work, we are committed to strengthening the capacity of our team on gender equality by investing in training and learning opportunities for our staff. More broadly, we also carry the responsibility to contribute to improving the public sector practices in employment of women and men, and creating and guaranteeing decent jobs. As part of a standard-setting organization, Better Work practices what it advocates.

The Better Work team is addressing gender norms to guarantee a workplace free of (sexual) harassment. We recognize the challenges of combining paid work and care and adjust our workplace and working conditions to allow women and men to live equally fulfilling lives as workers and care providers. In employment, the team is committed to promote the leadership and skills and career development of women.



the global policy dialogue on the SDGs. Better Work's unique convening power of actors in the global garment supply chain will be harnessed to influence gender norms.

The global policy dialogue on decent work that Better Work seeks to inform with our evidence and experience is also a window of opportunity to promote the importance of freedom of association and the need to strengthen **women's voice and representation**. This is both an implementation strategy as well as

a key driver for women's economic empowerment. Despite seemingly systemic challenges, women have the power to exert their voice, agency and autonomy and transform their living and working circumstances. Inclusive leadership does appear to increase women's union engagement, as research in Bangladesh and Vietnam shows. Giving women a place at the bargaining table and including gender issues in negotiation frameworks will also encourage the participation of women in the trade union structures.<sup>21</sup>

## 5.4 Operationalizing the strategy

INTERNAL PROCESSES	IN-FACTORY SERVICES	RESEARCH, COMMUNICATIONS & POLICY INFLUENCE	PARTNERSHIPS
Staff training	Scale up of sexual harassment prevention training	Research on gender equality impacts	Collaboration with national governments on gender responsive policy and legal frameworks
Internal awareness-raising campaign	Scale up of supervisory skills training for women supervisors	Advocacy campaign	Capacity building for trade unions and employer organizations on gender responsiveness
	Quotas for women representation in advisory and PICCs	Informing ILO and IFC/World Bank policies	Leverage of brands' priorities and access to drive change for gender equality in their supply chains
	Deeper investigation of discrimination in assessments		Collaboration with global and local NGOs on SRHR, nutrition, breastfeeding and pre/post-natal healthcare, financial literacy

## 24 A more equitable workplace is within our grasp

While serious challenges remain to achieving full gender equality in the world's garment factories, significant progress has been made. The success of our model for improving working conditions through women's empowerment has been validated by third-party research. Now we are leveraging this success, and our learnings from the research, to scale up positive impact on gender equality and achieve lasting change. We will report back to all stakeholders on our progress as we continue to refine our vision and implement this strategy.

### NOTES

- 1 Brown, DK et al. (2016) "Impact evaluation of Better Work: A Report from Tufts University".
- 2 ILO. 2017. *Report of the Meeting of Experts on Violence against Women and Men in the World of Work* (Geneva). GB.329/INS/INF/3
- 3 In 2019, the ILO celebrates its 100th anniversary. In the run up to the anniversary seven Centenary Initiatives are being implemented – part of a package of activities aimed at equipping the Organization to take up successfully the challenges of its social justice mandate in the future.
- 4 UN Women (2016), *Women and Sustainable Development Goals*
- 5 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5> (accessed on 7 August 2017).
- 6 The Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) – a partnership between ILO, UN Women and the OECD – will bring together a diverse set of actors at the global, regional and national levels to support governments, employers and workers and their organizations, and other stakeholders, to make equal pay between women and men for work of equal value a reality.
- 7 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw> (accessed on 7 August 2017)
- 8 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/committee.htm> (accessed on 7 August 2017)
- 9 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html> (accessed on 7 August 2017)
- 10 <http://www.weprinciples.org/Site/PrincipleOverview/>
- 11 WBG (2016), *Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction, and Inclusive Growth – 2016-2023 Gender Strategy*
- 12 IFC (2016), *SheWorks: Putting Gender-Smart Commitments into Practice – Executive Summary*
- 13 OECD (2011), *Women's Economic Empowerment – Issues Paper*
- 14 Hossain (2012) and Kabeer et al. (2011)
- 15 ILO (2016), *Women at Work – Trends 2016*
- 16 At the time of writing, Better Work operates across three regions, in seven countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua and Vietnam.
- 17 Gallup, Inc. and ILO (2017), *Towards a better future for women and men at work: voices of women and men* (Geneva, ILO)
- 18 ILO (2016), *Women at Work – Trends 2016*
- 19 IndustriALL, the Global Union that represents workers in garment, textile, leather, and footwear industries, has established the development of women in leadership positions at all levels in the trade union movement as a key priority, including in South and South-East Asia.
- 20 Reerink, A (2006) Report on a Survey on Women and Gender Issues in Trade Union Organizations in Indonesia, ILO. [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-jakarta/documents/publication/wcms\\_117189.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-jakarta/documents/publication/wcms_117189.pdf)
- 21 Evans (2017), "Patriarchal unions = weaker unions? Industrial relations in the Asian garment industry" in *Third World Quarterly*, 38:7, 1619-1638.

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**United States (US Department of Labor, USDOL)**

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