



BetterWork

ETHIOPIA

Annual Report 2025

Compliance Data from 2024



**International
Labour
Organization**



IFC

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Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities

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IN NUMBERS



35080

Workers (88%
Female)



32

FDI and local
active factories
in the program
in 2024



46.5% (2023)

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

Country context

Ethiopia's textile and garment sector has been a cornerstone of its industrial ambitions, reflecting its rich history and future potential. The industry encompasses the entire value chain, from cotton cultivation to garment manufacturing. Notably, while the country has about 3 million hectares suitable for cotton production, only a small fraction is currently utilized, indicating significant room for expansion.

Ethiopia's security situation in 2024 has shown signs of relative improvement following the peace agreement in November 2022 that ended the Tigray conflict. However, challenges persist due to the civil war in the Amhara region between Federal Forces and an armed militia group and sporadic unrest in Oromia and other regions, along with lingering tensions from ethnic and political divisions. These dynamics have continued to affect the garment and textile sector with varying intensity. Factories in regions such as the Hawassa Industrial Park have been operating and maintaining some production level, but security concerns in other areas have disrupted supply chains and raised costs. Several factories in Hawassa Industrial Park have been closed, and most have downsized their operations. Ethiopia continues to face the repercussions of losing access to the U.S. African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which provided duty-free access to U.S. markets for approximately 6,500 products. Ethiopia's AGOA eligibility was

suspended on January 1, 2022, due to concerns over human rights violations. Despite ongoing discussions and efforts to address these issues, the U.S. government announced on December 21, 2024, that Ethiopia will remain ineligible for AGOA benefits in 2025, marking the third consecutive year of exclusion.

Ethiopia is implementing its economic reforms, focusing on monetary, fiscal, financial, public debt, investment, and trade policies.¹ In July 2024, the IMF approved a 48-month ECF arrangement worth \$3.4 billion to support Ethiopia's home-grown economic reform agenda. This program addresses macroeconomic imbalances, restores external debt sustainability, and lays the foundation for higher, inclusive, and private sector-led growth.² Ethiopia is in the final stages of negotiating debt restructuring under the G20's Common Framework.³ While progress has been made in introducing a floating exchange rate, the launching of the Ethiopian Security Exchange challenges such as high inflation and fiscal deficit remain. While these measures are expected to boost long-term economic stability, their benefits have yet to reach the apparel sector, which remains vulnerable to global trade dynamics, internal conflict, and access to international markets.

Ethiopia's textile and garment sector attracts significant foreign direct investment (FDI), mainly from Asian economies. This investment supports Ethiopia's goal of becoming a global textile hub; the exclusion from AGOA continues to push Ethiopian factories toward alternative markets, strengthening trade ties with China and other Asian partners.

Against this backdrop, the documentary *Made in Ethiopia*, released in November 2024, provides a nuanced exploration of China's industrial influence in Africa through the lived experiences of workers and industry stakeholders in Ethiopia's apparel sector. The film highlights the complexities of globalization, examining power imbalances, cultural frictions, and economic dependencies that shape Ethiopia's evolving industrial landscape.

¹ [Ethiopia Economic Outlook | African Development Bank Group](#)

² [IMF chief sees 'strong progress' in Ethiopia's economic reforms - The African](#)

³ ["Ethiopia's Reform Is Tough, Takes Time—Please Be Patient": IMF Chief Pleads](#)



About the ONEILO-Siraye Program

Launched in 2019, the ONEILO-Siraye Programme is a unique collaborative initiative. It is designed to improve labor conditions, promote inclusive industrialization, and strengthen worker rights in Ethiopia's garment and textile sector. The program integrates various ILO-led interventions, including:

- **Better Work Ethiopia (BWE):** Focused on enhancing compliance with national and international labour standards.
- **Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE):** Provides training to improve workplace productivity and management practices.
- **The Vision Zero Fund (VZF):** Works to reduce occupational accidents and ensure worker safety.
- **Labour Administration and Inspection (LABADMIN):** Supports government institutions in improving labour law enforcement and factory inspections.
- **Inclusive Labour Markets and Working Conditions (INWORK):** Addresses employment contracts, fair wages, and collective bargaining.

Operating at national, regional, and factory levels, the program has played a pivotal role in shaping Ethiopia's industrial labour landscape, fostering a safer, fairer, and more competitive garment sector.

Impact to date

Since its inception, the ONEILO-Siraye Programme has been instrumental in enhancing working conditions, strengthening worker representation, and promoting business competitiveness in Ethiopia's garment sector. Through a comprehensive approach, the program has helped factories implement sustainable labor practices, improve compliance with national and international standards, and empower workers.

Systemic Changes Observed over the Years

IMPROVED WORKER WELL-BEING

The ONEILO-Siraye Programme has significantly impacted worker well-being, with substantial improvements in income, safety, representation, and workplace conditions, as evidenced by the 2024 impact assessment data.⁴

- **Reduction in Working Hours:**
 - Average daily working hours declined from 10.4 hours in 2019 to 8.5 hours in 2023 in treatment factories.
 - This reduction in excessive overtime contributed to better work-life balance and improved worker productivity.
- **Increase in Take-Home Wages:**
 - The average take-home wage for workers in treatment factories increased to ETB 2,242, compared to ETB 1,946 in control factories.
 - Men in treatment factories earned ETB 2,916 on average, while women earned ETB 1,926, highlighting persistent gender disparities in wages.
- **Enhanced Worker Benefits:**
 - 98% of workers in treatment firms received factory-provided meals in 2023, compared to 33% in 2019.

⁴ Oya, C., and Schaefer, F. (2024), "ONEILO-SIRAYE Programme Ethiopia: Evaluation Report," SOAS Global Development, Research Report No.1, London: SOAS University of London.

- 65% had employer-provided transport, reducing absenteeism and improving punctuality.
- **Improvements in Occupational Safety & Health (OSH):**
Training initiatives promoted using personal protective equipment (PPEs), and clearer communication on safety protocols led to heightened awareness of occupational risks. Notably, the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) committees empowered workers to collaboratively identify and address safety violations with management, promoting safer workplaces.
 - 83% of treatment factories conducted emergency drills, up from 72% in 2019.
 - OSH awareness increased among workers from 65% in 2019 to 51% in 2023, though awareness levels declined in control firms.
 - Incidents of worker exposure to hazardous chemicals decreased from 33% to 18% in treatment factories.

STRENGTHENED WORKER REPRESENTATION AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The ONEILO-Siraye Programme substantially improved trade union access, dispute resolution, workers' rights, and win-win dialogue between workers and managers. The Programme facilitated significant strides in worker representation and industrial relations. Trade unions gained increased access to industrial parks (IPs) where the garment and textile sectors work. This access enabled unions to work with managers to resolve grievances effectively, promote social dialogue, and reduce instances of unlawful worker dismissals. In addition to the growing union membership and improved workplace cooperation. Even in factories without formal union representation, OSH and grievance committees, established with the support of the programme, played a pivotal role in improving the dialogue between workers and management. These committees became a vital platform for addressing worker concerns and promoting accountability. The independent impact assessment of the programme shows that.⁵

⁵ Oya, C., and Schaefer, F. (2024), "ONEILO-SIRAYE Programme Ethiopia: Evaluation Report," SOAS Global Development, Research report No.1, London: SOAS University of London.

- ▶ 60% of treatment firms now have unions (compared to only 38% in control firms).
- ▶ Grievance mechanism access increased by 37 percentage points.
- ▶ Successful dispute resolution doubled (from 28% to 55%).
- ▶ Unlawful dismissals dropped in treatment firms but increased in control firms.

ENHANCED PRODUCTIVITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

The ONEILO-Siraye Programme significantly contributed to higher productivity and competitiveness within factories. Integrating Better Work and SCORE initiatives, which focused on improving workplace cooperation, productivity, and technical skills, proved impactful. Factories experienced reduced absenteeism, lower turnover rates, and fewer workplace accidents, contributing to productivity gains.

Factory managers and workers recognized the value of the training activities, which enhanced skills and boosted morale. Improved workplace organisation and safety reduced wasted time and resources, further elevating productivity. Workers noted a decline in absenteeism and accidents, which translated into financial benefits for factories, such as reduced healthcare costs, improved production continuity, and enhanced profitability.

Moreover, the programme's impact extended to product quality. Factories reported reductions in customer complaints, wastage, and better production outputs. Sales data revealed significant growth, which, while partially attributed to increased demand, also reflected the programme's success in fostering competitive, high-quality production environments.

IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN LABOUR ADMINISTRATION

The ONEILO-Siraye Programme successfully identified and addressed systemic challenges in the Ethiopian garment industry, mainly focusing on addressing gaps in labor rights policies. These gaps may have included issues related to the protection of workers' rights, fair wages, working conditions, and occupational safety. By working closely with the government, employers, and trade unions, the program aimed to close these policy gaps and ensure that labor rights were upheld following international standards. This collaborative approach helped to

create sustainable interventions that promoted a more equitable and safe working environment for garment industry workers in Ethiopia.

Progress in developing policy frameworks, such as the OSH and minimum wage directives, highlighted the programme's long-term impact.

The OSH directive also has the potential to influence a broad spectrum of economic sectors beyond garment and textiles as the development involved assessments of 11 major sectors. Similarly, the minimum wage directive offers an avenue to address wage inequalities, ensuring fair compensation regardless of gender or background. However, the full potential of these policy documents remains unrealized, as they have yet to be enacted.

Our Approach



Better Work Ethiopia has been implemented since 2019 in the framework of an ILO program called 'Advancing Decent Work and Inclusive Industrialization in Ethiopia,' or 'ONEILO-Siraye.' It operates on 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 key challenges to advance decent work in Ethiopia as one Program. Moreover, gender

considerations are mainstreamed across these components to deliver effective, need-based services. Better Work, SCORE, INWORK, and VZF operate in parallel in many countries. However, in Ethiopia, the programmes and departments are aligning their service packages and developing a new service model that brings each program's specializations to address the unique needs of the garment and textile industry in the country.

During the reporting period, the programme 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 and convened working conditions in the garment and textile sector and new sectors.

In the reporting period, the program expanded its services to more locally owned factories. It delivered core services to 32 active factories, reaching 35,080 workers (88% female). A total of 25 assessments and 175 advisory sessions were conducted to support factories in identifying and mitigating their improvement areas by setting up and strengthening OSH and HR management systems and through social dialogue. The capacity of 928 (466 Female) top—and middle-level managers, supervisors, and workers were strengthened through training, peer-to-peer learning, and coaching.

Compliance Overview

Better Work Ethiopia (BWE) provides core services to registered factories for a year. The factories are composed of local and foreign direct investment (FDI) factories across the country.

After registration, factories get 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 assessment findings, each factory, with the support of a BW Enterprise Advisor, works on developing an Improvement Plan (IP) and remediation throughout the remaining months. Tailored training programs and seminars are delivered depending on factory needs and identified issues. BW develops a Progress Report towards the end of a cycle (11th month), where achievements and challenges of a factory during the year are captured.

Key Improvements Observed (2023 to 2024)



Worker Well-being & Representation

- Worker well-being improvements: Reduction in excessive overtime, the introduction of productivity-linked bonuses, better food provisions, and enhanced safety awareness.
- Strengthened worker representation: Trade unions gained increased access to industrial parks, leading to better dispute resolution and fewer unlawful worker dismissals.
- Women's Leadership Programs: Women's participation in leadership roles increased, with 70% of trained women receiving promotions.



Compliance with Labour Standards

- OSH compliance improved, though still a major concern (69% non-compliance in 2024, down from 59% in 2023).
- Increased contract compliance: More factories are issuing clear employment contracts, reducing verbal hiring.
- Better age verification to prevent child labour.



Industry Adaptation as an Enabler of Labour Reforms

While the ONEILO-Siraye Programme does not directly drive macroeconomic reforms, it operates within and alongside Ethiopia's broader industrial and financial strategies. These reforms play a critical role in reinforcing labour rights advancements by:

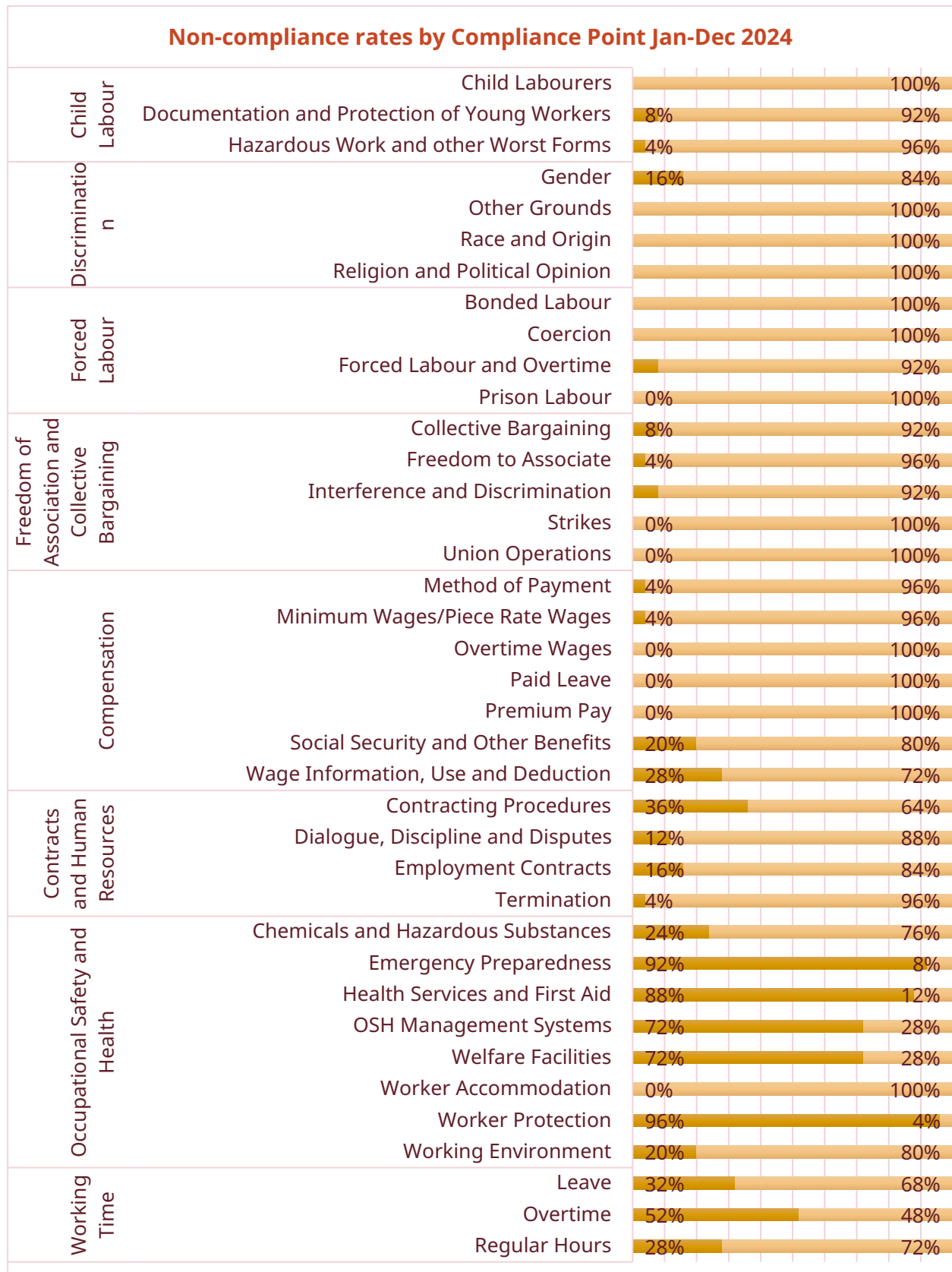
- Encouraging investment in decent work environments, improving compliance with international labour standards.
- Ensuring job stability and reducing employer resistance to wage and safety improvements.
- Providing a stable economic foundation for program-driven labour policy changes, such as OSH reforms and grievance resolution mechanisms.

By aligning its interventions with ongoing economic and security reforms, ONEILO-Siraye contributes to a more resilient, sustainable, and competitive industrial sector while keeping worker protections at the core of Ethiopia's economic transformation.

Coverage and Methodology

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

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

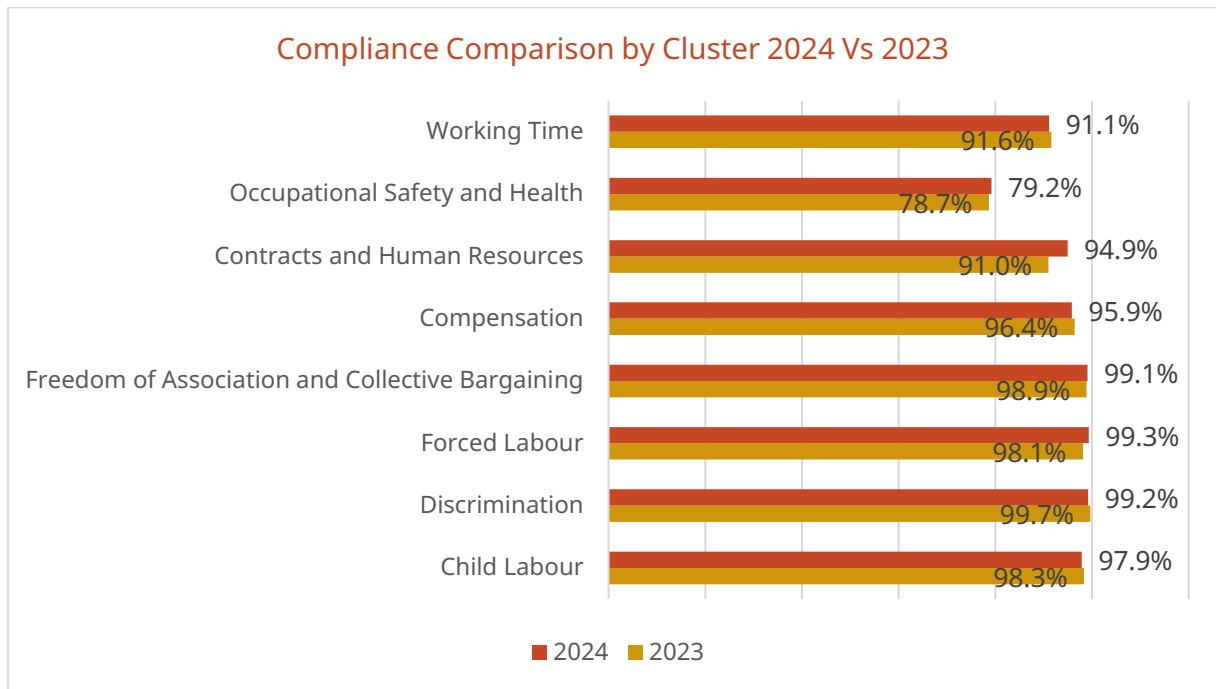


Detailed findings

In 2024, the programme conducted regular unannounced assessments across 25 factories to evaluate their compliance with national and international labour standards. These assessments helped identify areas of non-compliance and provided targeted support to factories in addressing the identified gaps.

Beyond factory-level challenges, the assessments also uncovered systemic compliance issues that extended beyond individual factory control, requiring intervention from Industrial Park management and national-level authorities. Addressing these broader challenges contributed to sector-wide compliance improvements.

The chart below presents a comparative overview of compliance levels between 2023 and 2024, showcasing the progress made through these interventions.



CORE LABOUR STANDARDS

The compliance clusters on Discrimination, Child Labour, Freedom of Association (FOA), and Forced Labour are aligned with International Labour Standards (ILS), which Ethiopia has ratified and integrated into its national legal framework. Since

these conventions are legally binding, their implementation follows the same approach as other labour standards in the country.

However, as reflected in the compliance data, non-compliance in these areas is relatively low, suggesting that serious violations are not widespread. One possible explanation is the limited development of factory-level unionization, which affects the enforcement and visibility of Freedom of Association (FOA) and Collective Bargaining (CB) rights. Strengthening these areas through expanded worker representation, improved compliance monitoring, and employer engagement could further enhance adherence to international labour standards.

The registered factories are formal industries that don't hire workers under the age of 18, and there has been no child labour indicated in assessments so far. However, there were areas of improvement needed 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 and a national ID. Furthermore, factories have significantly improved gender referencing in job announcements, which used to be a common practice.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC rate	inverse
Child Labour	Child Labourers	0%	100%
	Documentation and Protection of Young Workers	8%	92%
	Hazardous Work and Other Worst Forms	4%	96%
Discrimination	Gender	16%	84%
	Other Grounds	0%	100%
	Race and Origin	0%	100%
	Religion and Political Opinion	0%	100%
Forced Labour	Bonded Labour	0%	100%
	Coercion	0%	100%
	Forced Labour and Overtime	8%	92%
	Prison Labour	0%	100%
Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining	Collective Bargaining	8%	92%
	Freedom to Associate	4%	96%
	Interference and Discrimination	8%	92%
	Strikes	0%	100%
	Union Operations	0%	100%

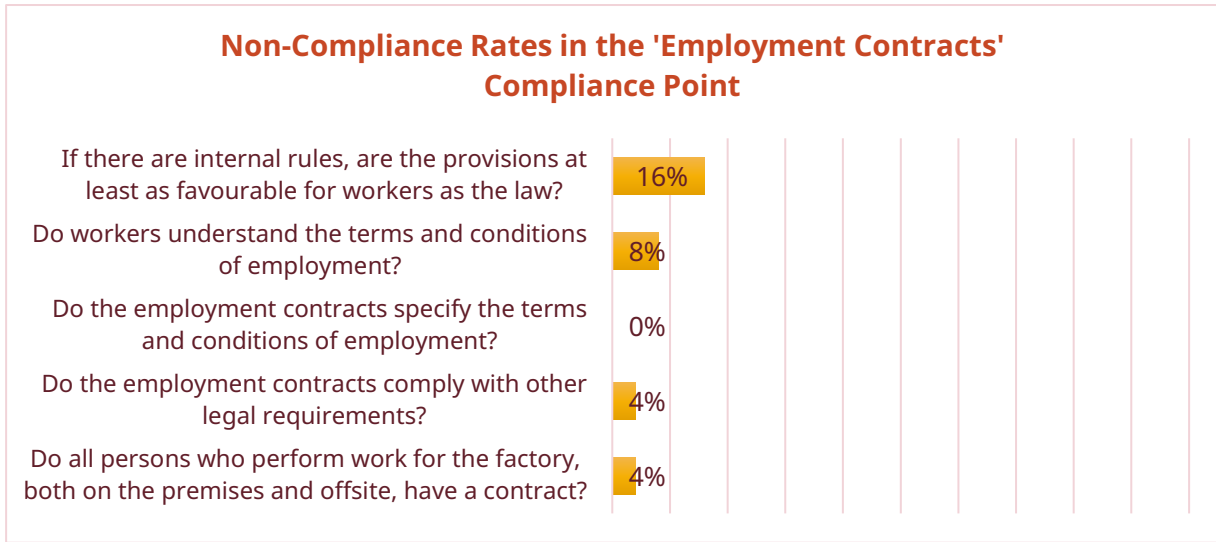
NATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS

CONTRACTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

The Better Work service focuses on strengthening factories' management systems, which drive sustainable change. The programme provided advisory services and training to address the gaps, and improvements were observed in the factories' HR management systems.

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 by 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 and disciplinary and termination procedures. The average compliance of this cluster in 2023 was 93%. The current year's average compliance level slightly increased to 95%.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC Rate	Inverse
Contracts and Human Resources	Contracting Procedures	36%	64%
	Dialogue, Discipline, and Disputes	12%	88%
	Employment Contracts	16%	84%
	Termination	4%	96%



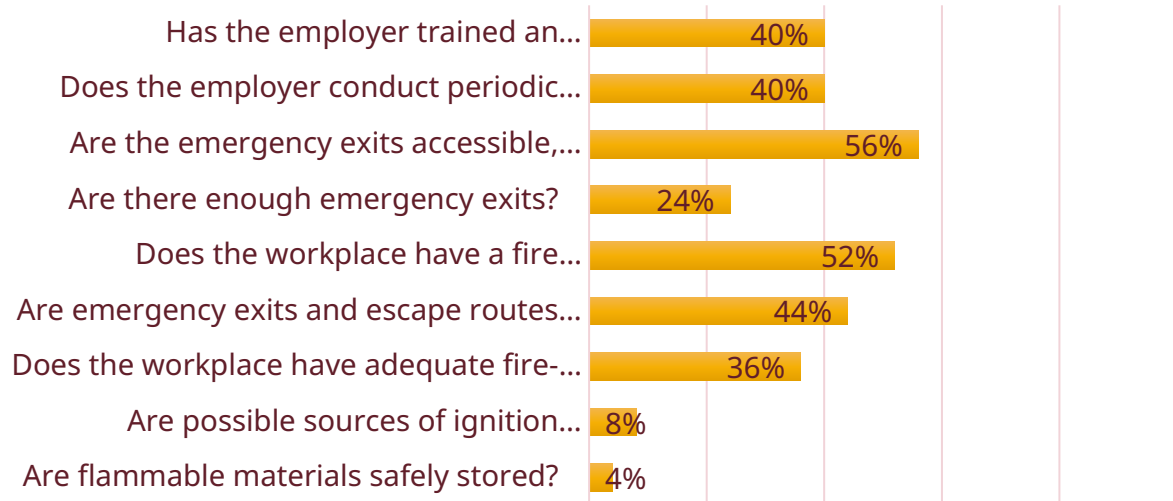
OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH)

Since the programme's inception, it has been observed that most factories are not fulfilling their OSH legal obligation. Out of the non-compliances cited in the 25 assessments conducted in 2024, about 69% of the findings relate to OSH issues.

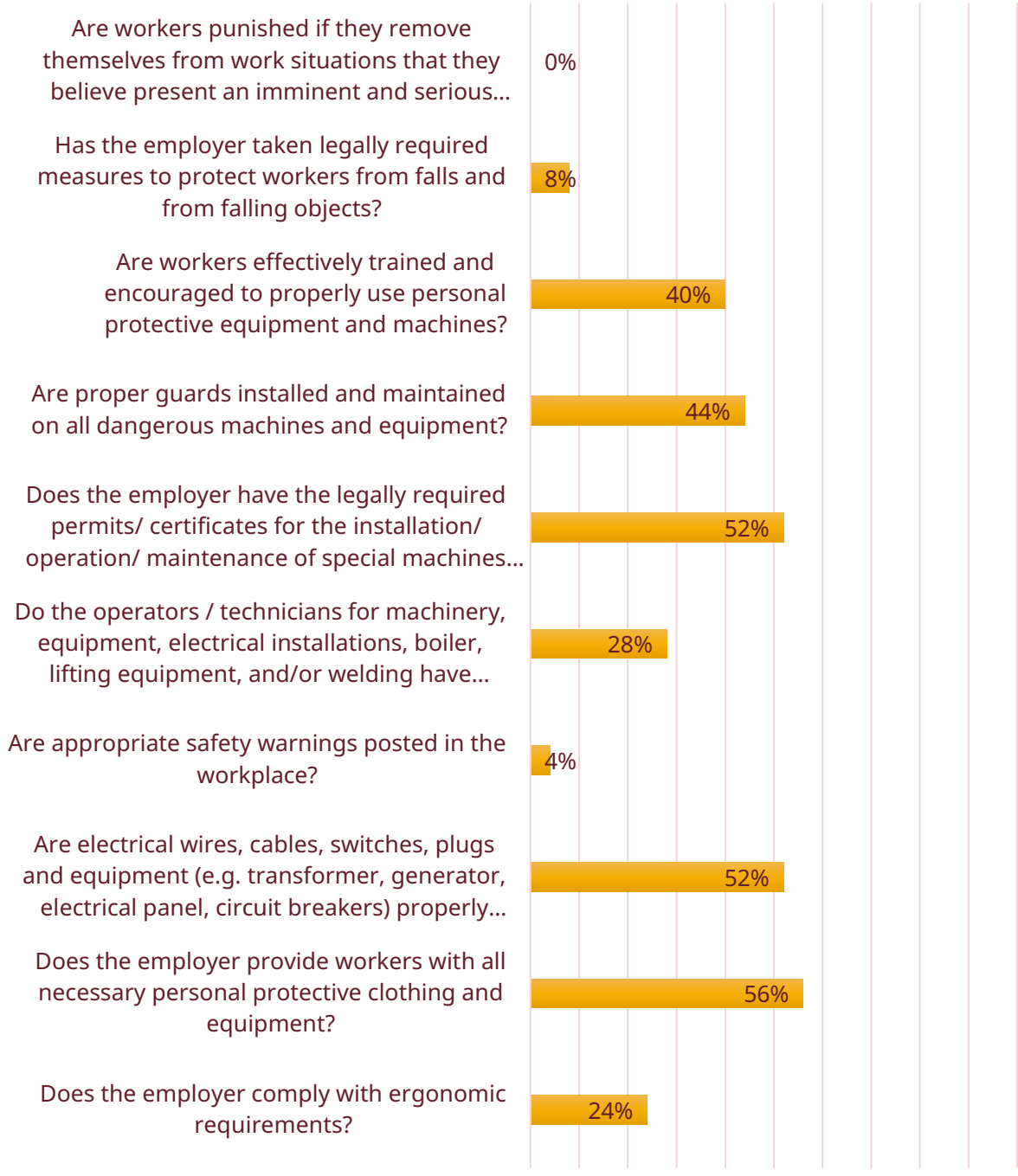
In general, throughout Better Work Ethiopia interventions, factories' attitudes/outlooks changed from a quick-fix mentality towards seeking sustainable change, hence improving OSH management systems. In addition, factories are demonstrating improvement in their OSH practices.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC rate	Inverse
Occupational Safety and Health	Chemicals and Hazardous Substances	24%	76%
	Emergency Preparedness	92%	8%
	Health Services and First Aid	88%	12%
	OSH Management Systems	72%	28%
	Welfare Facilities	72%	28%
	Worker Accommodation	0%	100%
	Worker Protection	96%	4%
	Working Environment	20%	80%

Non-Compliance Rates in the 'Emergency Preparedness' Compliance Point



Non-Compliance Rates in the 'Worker Protection' Compliance Point



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 done on weekends were indicated frequently. With continuous advisory, training, seminars, and the factories’ efforts, these issues are declining moderately. Factories with trade unions also consult unions to rearrange weekly working hours. The compliance assessments conducted in 2023 show the average compliance levels for working time and compensation clusters are 89% and 97%, respectively. In 2024, the compliance level of these two clusters shows 91% and 96%, respectively.

Cluster	Compliance Point	NC Rate	Inverse
Compensation	Method of Payment	4%	96%
	Minimum Wages/Piece Rate Wages	4%	96%
	Overtime Wages	0%	100%
	Paid Leave	0%	100%
	Premium Pay	0%	100%
	Social Security and Other Benefits	20%	80%
	Wage Information, Use, and Deduction	28%	72%
Working Time	Leave	32%	68%
	Overtime	52%	48%
	Regular Hours	28%	72%

Non-Compliance Rates in the 'Wage Information, Use and Deduction' Compliance Point

Does the employer properly inform workers about wage payments and deductions?



Does the employer keep only one accurate payroll record?



Has the employer made any unauthorized deductions from wages?



Destaye's Union Leadership Journey

Destaye Yitbarek is a Trade Union (TU) executive member and the union's cashier at Vestis Garment. Despite the TU being established two years ago, it only became active recently. Destaye and other leaders have undergone training in TU management, labor law, conflict management, and collective bargaining, which enhanced their skills and understanding of their roles. The TU has seen membership growth and now operates from an office within the company.

A recent experience-sharing event inspired Destaye with other trade unions, especially women-led. Their resilience and accomplishments moved her. She stresses the need for effective communication and transparency to help current and prospective members grasp the union's progress and challenges. Drawing inspiration from other unions, she advocates for greater economic engagement by suggesting that the union take charge of one of the factory cafeterias to benefit workers and bolster the union's strength.





Looking forward

The year 2025 marks the conclusion of Better Work Ethiopia's current strategic phase, highlighting the programme's significant contributions to improving working conditions, enhancing industrial relations, and strengthening labour governance. Over this phase, the programme has successfully expanded worker representation, improved compliance with occupational safety and health (OSH) standards, and driven productivity gains through workplace cooperation initiatives. As this phase ends, the focus will shift towards a seamless transition into the next strategic period, ensuring that progress is sustained while broadening the programme's impact beyond the garment and textile sector. Phase II will build on these achievements by expanding into new industries, reinforcing policy advocacy efforts, and deepening engagement with national stakeholders to create a resilient and inclusive industrial environment in Ethiopia.

The sectoral expansion and strategic shifts in Phase II of Better Work Ethiopia are rooted in evaluation findings that emphasize:

- Diversifying impact across industries to strengthen Ethiopia's industrial base
- Aligning with global human rights and due diligence requirements
- Building on past programme successes to improve working conditions in new sectors
- Ensuring that business competitiveness and worker protections are mutually reinforced

The program will address the following key recommendations from its final external evaluation.⁶

- ▶ **Ensure that the ONEILO approach continues to be implemented in the programme's second phase.**

The ONEILO approach, by integrating multiple components that would typically be implemented as separate projects, was able to work towards tackling complex and multifaceted issues. Meanwhile, centralized management improves cost efficiency, management, and responsiveness, enhancing implementation.

⁶ Advancing Decent Work and Inclusive Industrialization in Ethiopia-ONEILO/SIRAYE Final Evaluation pp 42-46 <https://webapps.ilo.org/ievaldiscovery/#ak3wste>

Therefore, the ONEILO approach should continue to be applied to any future iterations of the Programme. In particular, the programme should maintain weekly meetings and a robust internal feedback system to ensure transparency, track progress, and regularly present evidence of successful practices to constituents.

▶ **Continue advocacy efforts and support government institutions and other relevant stakeholders to approve national-level policies.**

Key policy directives (e.g., the minimum wage policy) remain unimplemented and await the Government's approval. Enacting these policies would improve the well-being of factory workers across all sectors and help respond to their needs given the country's difficulties, such as high inflation affecting the compensation and livelihoods of workers.

▶ **Maintain and strengthen advocacy and awareness among factory management on the benefits of trade unions.**

Data pointed to increased union representation, leading to a sharp reduction of management support for unions. To ensure that unionization efforts do not stall or start decreasing, the ILO should strengthen existing advocacy efforts and raise awareness about the positive aspects of trade unions. In cases where factory management views unionization negatively, the ILO should find temporary arrangements to support workers' interests by establishing or strengthening PICCs or OSH committees.

▶ **Integrate labour source and host communities in program design and implementation.**

The Programme has contributed to improving the situation of women working in the garment and textile sector by increasing compensation, providing training, and ensuring better working environments for women. However, there remains a divide between the needs of rural women and women from urban environments. Rural women in host communities remain in more precarious conditions due to a lack of social connections, linguistic skills, SRH knowledge, and housing conditions.

Therefore, the Programme should consider ways to integrate host communities in their responses to the difficulties faced by rural-based women. This could be done by working with public and non-governmental institutions to inform women

about their rights, facilitate reporting harassment cases, and continue improving case management mechanisms.

- ▶ **Develop new and enhance existing business planning training and guidance for sustainability at the factory level.**

During implementation, factories encountered various challenges that affected their capacity to function and remain open, leading to capacity differences between factories to sustain the Programme’s achievements. Therefore, the Programme should find ways to work with factories that are most at risk of failing to sustain results and help them develop plans to respond to factors that undermine the factory’s capacity to sustain the ONEILO SIRAYE’s achievements.

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