

Terms of Reference

External Collaborator for

Developing Systematic Approaches to address

Compliance Performance beyond Tier 1

in the Apparel Industry

Background

Better Work is a collaboration between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group. The program brings together stakeholders from across the supply chain to improve working conditions, uphold labour rights, and enhance the competitiveness of the garment and textile sector through sustainable compliance practices.

Beyond direct engagement with factories, Better Work collaborates with governments to align national labour laws with ILO standards and enhance the capacity of labour inspectors to enforce compliance. Additionally, Better Work partners with global brands to ensure that improvements made at the factory level are sustained over time. It also supports employer and worker organizations by providing industry data and insights, strengthening unions' capacity to amplify workers' voices, and engages with development partners to advance broader industry-wide and economic development goals.

The apparel supply chains have evolved, becoming increasingly complex and challenging to monitor. While most brands primarily focus on Tier 1 suppliers (directly contracted factories producing finished products), many lack visibility into sub-tier suppliers (Tier 2 and Tier 3 etc), such as subcontractors, fabric producers, and raw material suppliers. These lower-tier suppliers often operate with minimal oversight, making them more vulnerable to labour rights violations and compliance risks. Addressing these gaps is critical for fostering fair labour practices throughout the entire supply chain.

Traditionally, Better Work's factory-level interventions depend heavily on direct assessments, advisory services, and comprehensive training, requiring significant resources and a robust in-country presence. Recognizing the limitations and resource-intensive nature of this model, Better Work seeks to pilot innovative, scalable approaches specifically targeting lower-tier suppliers. These new models will integrate training-of-trainer (ToT) methodologies, technology-enhanced learning solutions, targeted advisory services, and strategic partnerships with local organizations, enabling compliance improvements to effectively cascade through deeper supply chain tiers.

In selected countries, Better Work will pilot systematic intervention models tailored for Tier 2 suppliers and beyond, aiming for comprehensive and sustainable improvements without a full-scale local program presence. These interventions will not only enhance knowledge dissemination but will also establish systems that strengthen industrial relations, improve grievance mechanisms, promote gender equality, ensure occupational safety and health (OSH), and uphold overall decent work standards across the extended supply chain. Ultimately, this initiative aims to establish scalable, replicable intervention models capable of improving labour standards across diverse regional and supply chain contexts.

The initial pilot interventions are expected to focus on select countries where Better Work already has ongoing or emerging ecosystem initiatives or strategic partnerships. Priority countries under consideration include Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Final country selection will be confirmed during the initial phase of the consultancy.

Objective

The primary objective of this consultancy is to support Better Work in mapping and designing innovative, systematic approaches to significantly enhance labour compliance and decent work standards among selected sub-tier suppliers (beyond Tier 1) within apparel supply chains.

Specifically, the consultancy aims to:

- Produce recommendations of how Better Work could support beyond tier 1 suppliers through scalable and sustainable compliance improvement models that leverage digital technologies, learnings from Better Work advisory services, training-of-trainers methodologies, and strategic partnerships with local industry stakeholders and organizations, ensuring resource efficiency and local ownership.

- Develop tailored intervention frameworks that address key compliance challenges among selected lower-tier suppliers, focusing on critical areas such as occupational safety and health (OSH), workplace cooperation, industrial relations, grievance mechanisms, social dialogue, and gender equality.
- Identify key success factors and provide strategic recommendations for pilot interventions that could be effectively implemented across various regional contexts and additional supplier tiers, ultimately facilitating sustained, industry-wide improvements beyond direct factory-level interventions.

Achieving these objectives will position Better Work to drive broader systemic improvements, extending compliance standards and decent work practices deeper into global supply chains in a resource-efficient and sustainable manner.

Scope of Work and Key Deliverables

The consultants will support Better Work with the following:

No.	Task	Description
01	Supplier tier analysis and scope definition	<p>Conduct a comprehensive feasibility analysis to clearly define and identify sub-tier suppliers targeted by the intervention. The analysis should leverage existing ILO standards, industry terminology, and best practices to categorize supplier tiers (e.g., Tier 2, Tier 3, subcontractors, fabric producers, textile mills, accessory suppliers).</p> <p>The analysis should also include a research review of key compliance challenges typically observed among selected supplier groups, based on existing literature, desktop research, and stakeholder consultations, to inform the subsequent intervention design.</p> <p>Deliverable: Supplier Tier Analysis and Scope Definition Report, including tier definitions, SWOT analysis, key compliance challenges, recommended target tiers, and strategic justification.</p>
02	Stakeholder mapping and responsibility assignment	<p>Conduct a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise to identify relevant local and international stakeholders, including social partners, industry groups, local NGOs, training institutions, brands, and others, with a clear focus on their mandates, interests, available funding, influence, and capacity to support or directly implement compliance interventions.</p>

		<p>The mapping should also identify existing initiatives and organizations already engaging with sub-tier suppliers (Tier 2 and beyond), including Better Work partners and external actors, to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication.</p> <p>For local stakeholder mapping, the initial focus may prioritize Bangladesh, aligning with Better Work’s ongoing ecosystem approach piloted in the country, with potential for future replication in other contexts.</p> <p>The stakeholder mapping and consultations may also explore the role of selected Tier-1 suppliers as potential partners and stewards of compliance, gathering insights from top-performing Tier-1 and Tier-2/3 suppliers to inform the intervention design.</p> <p>Clearly define and recommend stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and potential ownership to ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of the interventions.</p> <p>Deliverable: Stakeholder Mapping and Responsibility Assignment Report, including stakeholder profiles detailing mandates, interests, influence, funding capacities, recommended roles, responsibilities, sustainability strategies, and mapping of existing initiatives focused on sub-tier suppliers.</p>
03	Recommendations for an intervention design	<p>Recommend and design a systematic and tailored intervention that addresses key compliance challenges among selected lower-tier suppliers, emphasizing but not limited to occupational safety and health (OSH), workplace cooperation, industrial relations, grievance mechanisms, social dialogue, and gender equality, considering Better Work’s core service model and experiences from Tier 1.</p> <p>Given the ambitious scope, the intervention design may initially prioritize one or two key focus areas (such as OSH or industrial relations) to pilot the systematic approach, with the potential to expand to additional thematic areas based on learnings, feasibility, and resource availability.</p> <p>The interventions should be designed for delivery in partnership with selected stakeholders identified through the stakeholder mapping exercise, to strengthen local ownership and sustainability.</p>

		The intervention design framework should also identify key success factors critical for effective implementation, scalability, and long-term impact.
		Deliverable: Intervention Design Framework outlining specific methodologies, compliance targets, implementation guidelines tailored for lower-tier suppliers, delivery partnerships, and key success factors for success and scalability.

Deliverables and Timelines

Deliverable	Description	Deadline
Supplier tier analysis and scope definition report	Identification and justification of targeted supplier tiers based on feasibility and strategic relevance, including swot analysis.	15 July 2025
Stakeholder mapping and responsibility assignment report	Mapping of key local and international stakeholders with clear recommendations on roles, influence, mandates, and sustainability potential.	15 August 2025
Intervention design framework and recommendations, including delivery approaches through stakeholder partnerships and identification of key success factors for scalability.	Tailored intervention design addressing key compliance areas for selected lower-tier suppliers.	15 September 2025

*** The contract duration is from 16 June until 15 October 2025. The work period falls within the contract period; however, this does not represent the actual number of workdays.

Cost and Payment Schedule

Documents and other deliverables will be requested during the contract period and according to the needs of the Better Work Program. A request will be made in the form of

an email to the external collaborator which will set out the work to be done. The external collaborator should then send an email agreement to the proposal.

The External Collaborator will only be paid upon satisfactory completion of deliverables and upon receipt of signed invoices, referring to deliverables as described in the contract with the respective amount and working days indicated.

Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience designing and implementing compliance improvement frameworks or scalable interventions within supply chains, ideally in the apparel, textile, or TCLF sectors.
- Strong analytical and strategic thinking skills, particularly in strengthening systems that promote decent work, occupational safety and health (OSH), industrial relations, and social dialogue.
- Experience conducting feasibility studies and stakeholder mapping and developing context-sensitive tools and methodologies.
- Proven ability to design or adapt training, assessment, and advisory tools aligned with international labour standards, including ILO Conventions.
- Excellent writing and presentation skills, with the ability to produce clear, concise, and practical outputs for diverse stakeholder audiences.
- Solid understanding of ILO frameworks, Better Work methodologies, and labour compliance dynamics in garment and textile supply chains.
- Fluency in English, both written and spoken; additional language skills are an asset.
- Experience working in culturally diverse environments, demonstrating sensitivity and the ability to collaborate with local organizations and institutions.

Reporting

The consultant will report to ILO Better Work Learning and Capacity Building Specialist.

Submission

All applicants must send their technical and financial proposals to betterwork@ilo.org. The deadline to submit your application is 31 May 2025 at midnight (CET). Only selected applicants will be contacted for an interview.

Confidentiality Statement

All data and information received for the purpose of this assignment are to be treated confidentially and are only to be used in connection with the execution of these Terms of Reference. All intellectual property rights arising from the execution of these Terms of Reference are assigned to IFC and ILO. The contents of written materials obtained and used in this assignment may not be disclosed to any third parties without the express advance written authorization of the IFC and ILO.