



International
Labour
Organization

Decent Work in
Garment Supply
Chains Asia

► Moving the Needle

Gender equality and decent work
in Asia's garment sector



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¹ Better Work is as a partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation. It brings together diverse groups – governments, global brands, factory owners, and unions and workers – to improve working conditions in the garment industry and make the sector more competitive.

► Foreword

Over the last three decades, the garment sector in Asia has been a key entry point for women entering the formal economy, bringing with it unprecedented opportunities for advancing women's economic empowerment. Yet, while the sector has provided millions of women with improved economic and social wellbeing, many opportunities remain yet to be realized as persistent gender gaps undermine the achievement of Decent Work for all. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has both underscored and further exacerbated many of these issues.

For instance, though women account for the majority of the garment workforce across Asia, they continue to face obstacles in moving into better jobs and opportunities. They are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs in the lower tiers of the supply chain and experience an average raw pay gap of 18.5 per cent, compared to their male counterparts. Women are also underrepresented in leadership positions in the industry, face disproportionate burdens of unpaid care and domestic work (linked to traditional norms and attitudes), and are often at risk of sexual harassment and bullying at work. All issues are well documented in the industry –both in Asia and globally- and are incompatible with decent work.

Many companies already have policies and programmes in place to promote equal opportunity and decent work, recognizing that improved working conditions, gender equality and productivity contribute to industry sustainability. Several initiatives have made progress to close these gaps, however results could be further enhanced through strengthened partnerships, accountability and collective action.

While COVID-19 has had many detrimental impacts on the sector, stakeholders across the supply chain now have an opportunity to re-imagine the priorities for resilience and sustainability going forward –and with it, to build practical solutions that improve socio-economic outcomes for thousands of enterprises and millions of workers across Asia.

This paper draws upon evidence collected by variety of stakeholders. It sheds light on the importance of addressing gender equality now, while also providing ILO constituents and industry stakeholders with a holistic roadmap for action to accelerate progress towards gender equality within a wider strategy that places decent work and social justice at the heart of the post-pandemic business model.

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► Executive summary

Sector overview: Uncertain future for women workers

Before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, the combined garment, textiles and footwear (GTF) industry in Asia and the Pacific had an export value of US\$601 billion, representing 60 per cent of the value of the industry globally (ILO 2019g).

In 2019, the region employed an estimated 65 million garment sector workers, including both those in formal employment and informal employment, accounting for 75 per cent of GTF workers worldwide and a significant proportion of an estimated 453 million jobs related to global supply chains (ILO, Better Work and Cornell University 2020; ILO 2016b). Within the region, GTF employment accounted for 3–4 per cent of total employment, compared with an employment share of 1.6 per cent in other regions (ILO, Better Work and Cornell University 2020).

In recent decades across the region, the sector has developed around a model based on low-cost, low-skilled, largely female labour for markets mainly in the United States of America, Europe and Japan; although China is now emerging as the world's largest market for garments. Globally, it is estimated that about 80 per cent of garment sector workers are women (Better Work 2019c). In total, 35 million women work in Asia and the Pacific's GTF sector (ILO, Better Work and Cornell University 2020). Among Asian countries, only in India and Pakistan are majority of garment workers male, although in recent years the proportion of women workers had been growing. The GTF sector furthermore indirectly supports millions of others in families, communities and related businesses far beyond the centres where garment factories are located.

There has been considerable debate in recent decades, including among feminist researchers, on the balance between the benefits and the decent work deficits associated with lower quality formal employment for women in garment manufacturing.

- The positive aspects most often highlighted include the opportunities provided for women in situations where there is no social safety net, and where the main informal work alternatives offer far worse prospects. Associated with garment sector employment are improvements in social and financial autonomy (Kabeer 2004), together with access to labour protections and paid benefits (for example maternity leave) that come with formal employment – albeit often with highly variable levels of enforcement. However, for workers to choose their employment freely, to develop their potential to the fullest and to reap the economic rewards they deserve, equality and non-discrimination must be respected (ILO 2019a).
- The well-documented decent work deficits for women workers in the garment sector (which vary from country to country) include:
 - low pay and gender pay gaps (despite increases in minimum wage levels and government commitments to pay equity in recent years);
 - long hours;
 - systemic discrimination (including on the grounds of pregnancy);
 - a lack of policies and programmes to adequately address the double burden of paid and unpaid work carried out mainly by women;

► Given their concentration in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, women in the garment sector are disproportionately affected by job losses due to COVID-19.

- gender-based violence and harassment²;
- limited opportunities for skills development and career advancement; and
- barriers to participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of the global economy, which severely affected garment supply chains worldwide, future prospects for women in the sector are currently uncertain. The typical garment sector worker in Asia lost out on at least two to four weeks of work early in the pandemic, with only three in five workers being called back to the factory (ILO, Better Work and Cornell University 2020). It is estimated that millions of garment sector jobs were lost due to the disruptions. Millions more may follow in a second wave of job losses as global brands seek further price cuts, reduce orders and delay payments to suppliers (Anner 2020).

The pandemic has further intensified gender disparities and dynamics in the sector in Asia (ILO, Better Work and Cornell University 2020). Given their concentration in low-skilled and low-paid jobs, women in the garment sector are disproportionately affected by job losses due to COVID-19. They have also faced increased responsibilities for unpaid care work in the household, high levels of stress, increased gender-based violence, increased poverty, and higher levels of indebtedness incurred to support

families deprived of income. Due to the scarcity of work within the wider economy as a result of the pandemic, women in the sector also face the possibility of formal garment sector jobs being taken up by men.

One important consideration in this context is the pandemic's potential acceleration of longer-term impacts on any sector restructuring and technological upgrading, including digitalization and automation (ILO 2020g). To the extent that such developments occur in the Asian context, a key issue that emerges is the relationship between technological development and potential trends towards workforce defeminization. Indeed, ILO research suggests a relationship between technological advance and defeminization of the garment sector workforce (Kucera and Tejani 2014).

As sector actors look ahead to the pandemic recovery period, stakeholder input in preparing this paper indicated that women's voice and representation are to date largely absent from relevant decision-making and social dialogue processes. This is unsurprising, in light of the already prevalent underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making roles within trade unions, employers' organizations, factory management and other sectoral and world of work institutions. Findings of a more general CARE International (2020a) survey of 30 countries, combined with the organization's on-the-ground experience and evidence base, further indicated that most national committees established to respond to COVID-19 do not have equal female-male representation.

² Under Article 1 of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), the term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment; the term "gender-based violence and harassment" means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment.

The consequence of such lack of voice and representation is that the particular priorities and needs of millions of women workers in the garment sector (and beyond) are not being heard where decisions are being made, and this will have a bearing on their lives. This situation links to factors such as the influence of discriminatory social norms that exclude women from decision-making and the time poverty experienced by most women as a result of disproportionate unpaid care work burdens.

The preceding critical gender challenges in the Asia garment industry will likely be further exacerbated by the anticipated impacts of the accelerating climate crisis. Three interconnected dimensions are highlighted with respect to environmental sustainability and climate change, their intersection with gender, and the future of the garment industry in the post COVID-19 era:

- First, climate change will likely have increasing actual and potential impacts on the industry and its predominantly female workforce. Heat stress, for example, is already taking a toll across the region on the health and welfare of women workers, their families and communities, among other things adding to women's unpaid care work burdens (ILO 2019i).
- Second, the industry itself – one of the most polluting on the planet – will have an impact on climate change and the environment as both a major source of global emissions and an important consumer and contaminator of often-fragile water resources.
- Third, the fashion industry's global "fast fashion/throw away culture" exerts unsustainable pressures on the environment, including that of unnecessary waste. Recent studies have found that an increasing proportion of European and North American consumers see sustainability of the products they buy as an important factor in purchasing decisions (Granskog et al. 2020).

At the same time, a number of barriers to change have presented themselves. First and foremost has been the power dynamics of the sector's brand-driven pricing, purchasing and contracting model. The incentives throughout the sector

are structured in a way that creates a "race to the bottom" characterized by low wage levels, thin margins, large "off-the-radar" informal and vulnerable sub-contracted workforces, and generally low levels of awareness among consumers of the real costs of the garments they purchase (high-profile consumer campaigns in Western markets notwithstanding).

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely intensified such dynamics. At the same time, however, it has presented new opportunities within the sector for promoting positive changes in the status of women. At a broader level, this message is highlighted in the global COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry, which was developed by the International Organisation of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation and IndustriALL Global Union, and coordinated by the ILO (ILO 2020d). Alongside other global frameworks relevant to the future of the global garment sector, this agreement provides an additional framework for multi-stakeholder engagement in both mitigating the impacts of the pandemic and – through the establishment, among other things, of sustainable systems of social protection – providing the building blocks for a more just and resilient garment industry (ILO 2020e).



Generating momentum for sector change: Key messages

Since the 1970s, the growth of the for-export garment sector in Asia has been accompanied by an increasingly diverse array of initiatives to address the deep-rooted manifestations of gender inequality and lack of sustainability around which the industry has been structured.

Drawing on an analysis of developments in the region, as well as interviews conducted with selected stakeholders, this paper identifies several key messages in support of intensified action and synergies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within garment sector supply chains in Asia. These fall into seven key "P" themes: possibility (for change), power, participation, partnership, planet, policy and progress.

Possibility: As stated in the aforementioned Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry, the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic presents a rare opportunity to promote a transformative agenda that can realize a future of work in the global garment sector that supports sustainable economic, social and environmental development. Gender equality and environmental sustainability must be central in this context, both as key drivers for change and as outcomes in their own right. At the same time, realizing this possibility must also acknowledge the other six key messages below, each of them critical to effective strategies and actions for change.

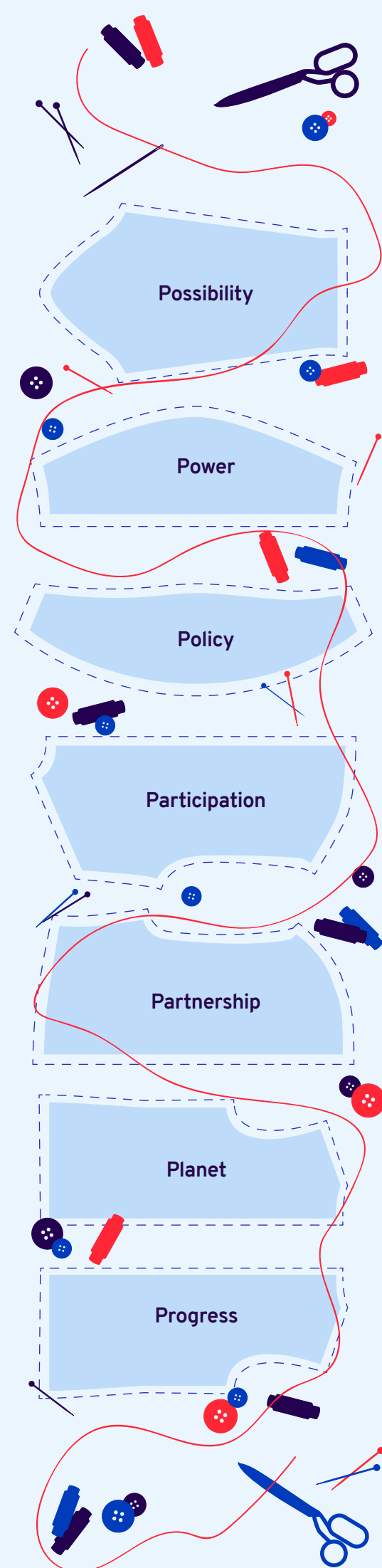
Power: The pandemic has highlighted the power differentials within the garment sector between brands and suppliers, workers and employers, and women and men. Much commentary in this context has highlighted the ways in which the overall balance of power under the current sector model ultimately favours international brands and buyers. Meanwhile the suppliers and predominantly female workforce in the sector, their families and their communities carry the major burden of job and income losses. The need to rebalance power dynamics has been highlighted by many stakeholders as essential to ensuring a more sustainable sector that is resilient, equitable and productive – and that brings shared prosperity for all. A key driver for such a shift is increasing the voice, representation and leadership of women within companies, employers' and workers' organizations, and social dialogue processes in the sector.

▶ The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic presents a rare opportunity to promote a transformative agenda that can realize a future of work in the global garment sector that supports sustainable economic, social and environmental development.

Policy: An essential cornerstone for transformative change in the garment sector is ensuring that effective, relevant and evidence-based public policy frameworks are in place at the global, regional and national levels. At the national level, these policies should be underpinned by government commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), international human rights frameworks, international labour standards and international environmental commitments. Relevant policy areas range from labour rights and gender equality to trade agreements, social protection and gender-responsive social infrastructure investments. A lack of systematic, comparable, gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated sector data presents a major impediment to effective policy development in this context, including with respect to the key thematic areas discussed in this paper. Company policies to address discrimination and promote workplace cooperation (e.g. through factory improvement committees) at both the international and national levels also play a vital role in this context.

Participation: Critical to transforming the position of women workers across the garment sector in Asia within the new post-COVID-19 “normal” is ensuring that women’s voice, representation and leadership lie at the heart of dialogue, policy development and decision-making in future strategies and plans. Priority must be extended to policies and measures that accelerate the movement of qualified women into leadership roles at all levels of the industry. Also vital to transformative change is ensuring intersectionality in policy and practice between gender and other forms of discrimination, including race, disability, indigenous status, ethnicity, migration status, age, family status, HIV status and sexual orientation. Ensuring representation of the needs and perspectives of the most marginalized workers in the sector in the decision-making process is critical to ensuring that nobody is left behind.

Partnership: Several factors stand out as being central to effective partnerships between sector actors for gender equality and women’s empowerment. These include shared interests and purpose; inclusion (governments, buyers, suppliers and workers, among others); power sharing; and an orientation towards “win-win” outcomes. Gender-inclusive social dialogue and tripartism are proven key vehicles for the development of such partnerships, with collective bargaining at the enterprise and sector levels being a key element of such interactions. Critical to “moving the needle” in this context is women engaging collectively – as well as with their male peers – through workers’ and employers’ organizations, women’s organizations and networks, consumer associations, international campaigns and myriad other organizational forms across the sector.



Planet: Many women workers already bear the brunt of climate change impacts such as increased workplace temperatures and disruptions due to extreme weather events. For them, the links between gender equality, labour rights, climate change and environmental sustainability are an everyday reality. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to leverage such links and synergies to accelerate efforts towards greater environmental sustainability within textile and garment production. Such efforts should be guided by “just transition” principles, and aim to reduce the sector’s environmental footprint by such means as greening production and employment at all levels, while also contributing to increased resilience, equity and productivity within the sector (ILO 2015b).

Progress: In the end, action is what counts in “moving the needle” towards more resilient, equitable and productive garment supply chains across the region. Positive change will only come with bold and decisive actions underpinned by clarity of shared vision and policy, inclusive participation and partnership. The International Working Group of the Garment Industry, established under the Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry, provides an important reference point in this respect. Even in the midst of the setbacks and challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing and leveraging existing good practices, experience and lessons across the region will be a key contributor in strengthening the impact of change initiatives and maintaining momentum for systemic change.³



Looking ahead: Strategies for change

“[T]ransformation will not happen organically or by tentative and disjointed steps,” suggests the landmark ILO (2019a) report *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality: For a Better Future of Work for All*. Drawing on this perspective, a theory of change is proposed to guide stakeholder cooperation and actions across the region in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within the garment sector in ways that synergize with efforts to respond to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Central to this theory of change are the following:

- achievement of pay equity in the sector;
- an end to discrimination, harassment and violence;
- a rebalancing of responsibilities for unpaid care; and
- achievement of equal voice, representation and leadership by women at all levels of the sector.

The recommendations outlined below are further proposed for joint stakeholder action to take advantage of opportunities created by the pandemic to reshape and reposition the sector for a more sustainable future, one that is resilient, equitable and productive.

³ A forthcoming ILO publication that will accompany this report describes several good practice case studies of working for gender equality and women’s empowerment in garment supply chains in Asia.



Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to provide a basis for joint stakeholder dialogue and action at regional and national levels within Asian garment supply chains. Highly interdependent and mutually reinforcing, they seek to: (i) support action by governments, employers, workers, NGOs, international agencies and other actors, both collectively and in their own right; and (ii) accommodate national diversity and build on the many and diverse existing initiatives already underway across the region.

The recommendations further inform a complementary Road Map published in parallel to this report: see ILO, Regional Road Map – Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work in Asia’s Garment Sector (2021). The Road Map provides a more detailed framework for multi-stakeholder dialogue and joint action to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment within the region’s garment sector.

Prioritize and promote joint stakeholder actions at all levels of the sector to continue addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while simultaneously improving gender equality in the garment sector in Asia in the longer term.

- Leverage the ILO’s COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry as a key framework for joint efforts in this regard, especially in those Asian countries initially prioritized by the International Working Group set up to promote and coordinate the Call to Action⁴. Link implementation of the Call to Action with other existing international platforms and agreements that support change in global and regional supply chains.⁵
- Promote and implement policies, strategies and measures to ensure that gender equality

and women’s empowerment commitments constitute a central element of the COVID-19 response and recovery in both formal and informal aspects of the sector.

- Ensure that purchasing practices that affect the wages and working conditions of women in the sector are also addressed as part of multi-stakeholder sector reform dialogue and initiatives.
- Strengthen the capacity of world of work institutions to take concrete actions and advance gender equality in the garment sector.

Prioritize attention to the achievement of equal pay for work of equal value across the garment sector in line with the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and SDG 8.5.

- Strengthen, monitor and enforce national policies and laws on equal pay for work of equal value, as well as minimum wage levels, in line with international commitments and guidance from international labour standards.
- Ensure women’s voices, representation and leadership are central to all initiatives and social dialogue concerning gender pay equity and minimum wage levels. Prioritize women-intensive sectors for attention in national minimum wage level negotiations.
- At the company/employer level, review and adjust hiring and promotion policies as well as wage and salary systems to ensure use of gender-neutral job evaluations to identify “work of equal value”.

⁴ These countries are: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Pakistan.

⁵ These include the:

- ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work;
- ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization;
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration);
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises;
- OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment & Footwear Sector; and
- United Nations (UN) Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19.

Prioritize, develop and support policies, strategies and measures to increase women's voice, representation and leadership in all aspects of the garment sector.

- ▶ Promote, strengthen and implement existing national policies, laws, strategies and plans on promoting women in leadership and management at all levels, including in business.
- ▶ Initiate and implement policies and measures to promote women's voice, representation and leadership social dialogue processes at all levels of the sector (from national to enterprise), including COVID-19 response and recovery and collective bargaining.
- ▶ Establish policies and measures to increase the number and participation of women in leadership and management roles within employers' and workers' organizations in the sector, including through establishing gender quotas or targets and providing leadership development opportunities, mentorships and sponsorships for women.
- ▶ Initiate and support measures to increase the number and participation of women in workplace leadership, management, supervision and bipartite committee roles. In this context, address barriers that constrain women's career advancement, voice, representation and leadership, including the influence of discriminatory social norms, lack of quality and affordable childcare, violence and harassment, and lack of skills development opportunities.
- ▶ Promote positive role models of women in leadership and management in the garment sector as well as in the economy as a whole.

Prioritize, develop and support policies, strategies and measures to eradicate violence and harassment within the garment sector, including gender-based violence, in line with the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

- ▶ Prioritize the promotion, implementation and ratification of Convention No. 190 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 as a central focus for multi-stakeholder advocacy and action within the sector, linking with initiatives to this end in wider society.
- ▶ Ensure the promotion and application within the sector of existing national policies, laws and strategies on gender equality, gender-based violence and women's health and wellbeing, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- ▶ Ensure that women's voice, representation and leadership are at the centre of all sector decision-making and social dialogue on policies and measures concerning violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.
- ▶ Ensure employers' organizations and workers' organizations are aware of and contribute to implementation of international commitments and national policies and laws to eradicate violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, in the world of work.
- ▶ Through social dialogue processes involving employers and workers, establish enterprise policies, procedures, safe complaint mechanisms, workplace committees, training programmes for managers and supervisors, and worker awareness programmes to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence, in line with Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206.

Prioritize attention to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of the disproportionate unpaid care work responsibilities carried by women in the garment sector, in line with the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183):⁶

- ▶ Promote education and public awareness-raising to challenge and shift discriminatory social norms regarding the roles of women and men with respect to unpaid care work.
- ▶ Encourage and promote the engagement of men in unpaid care work.
- ▶ Develop policies, strategies, measures and investments for accessible and quality care services and decent work for care workers, using tripartite dialogue and involving women workers.
- ▶ Expand and increase collectively financed maternity rights and protection, as well as parental and paternity leave and more family-friendly workplace policies, in line with international labour standards.
- ▶ Link such initiatives with the COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry and other efforts to expand social protection policy and coverage to address the needs of women, especially those in informal and vulnerable situations exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prioritize, promote and practice gender-inclusive social dialogue at all levels, including within the workplace.

- ▶ Ensure that gender inclusion is real, substantive and premised on systematic, trackable and accountable measures to achieve equality in voice, representation and leadership.

Accelerate efforts to ratify, implement and monitor International Labour Conventions and Recommendations that have a particular bearing on gender inequalities in the world of work.

- ▶ Leverage such Conventions – and associated ratification efforts and campaigns – to prioritize and promote policies and measures that contribute to gender equality and the application of international labour standards in Asia's garment sector supply chains.

Ensure that gender equality dimensions are mainstreamed into garment sector policies, strategies, plans and initiatives at all levels to strengthen environmental sustainability and address the impacts of climate change (for example, the promotion of green jobs and skills and investment in the greening of production processes that benefit all workers).

- ▶ Similarly, ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment policies, strategies, plans and initiatives at all levels take account of environmental sustainability and climate change considerations. These include the impacts on women workers' health and well-being, as well as productivity, stemming from developments such as (i) increased workplace temperatures; and (ii) the greater intensity and regularity of extreme weather events.

⁶ The full set of ILO policies and measures with respect to gender equality around unpaid care work is set out under the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work. The 5Rs are: recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; reward paid care work, by promoting more and decent work for care workers; and guarantee care workers' representation, social dialogue and collective bargaining. The 5R-related policies and measures are guided by international labour standards (ILO 2018a).

Increase the overall impact of the various stakeholder campaigns, programmes and projects promoting gender equality in the garment sector across the region by: (1) seeking joint initiatives where possible; and (2) sharing knowledge, experience, lessons and good practices for wider benefit and impact.

- Encourage, facilitate and support active collaboration at regional, subregional and national levels between actors working on gender equality in the sector – including through multi-stakeholder platforms where relevant – to amplify impact, enhance regular communications and ensure the efficient use of available resources.
- Take advantage of the regional online knowledge hub established by the ILO Decent Work in the Garment Sector Supply Chain in Asia and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) project to disseminate information, research and analysis, evaluation findings, lessons and good practices.

Strengthen the systematic collection, use and dissemination of up-to-date, comparable, sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data to inform the development of policies, measures and social dialogue processes to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment within garment sector supply chains in Asia. Specific measures should include:

- More regular labour force surveys in garment producing countries where this is not yet the case;
- More regular time-use surveys to gather data on the gender dynamics of unpaid work, including as part of labour force surveys,⁷ in line with resolutions of the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (2013).⁸

⁷ The ILO is exploring the potential for using time-use methods that could be attached to labour force surveys in a modular format to enable regular collection of time-spent in unpaid productive activities as a complement to national time-use surveys (ILO, n.d.e)

⁸ The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013 is widely regarded as a ground-breaking event. The Conference adopted five resolutions concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization; further work on forced labour, cooperatives and labour migration; and the functioning of the Conference (ILO, n.d.-f).

- Improved collection, analysis and availability of data on trends, issues and policy options related to pay equity; discrimination, violence and harassment; unpaid care work and women's voice, leadership and representation in sector decision-making;
- The development of a multi-stakeholder plan to: (1) map key data gaps; and (2) strengthen and support the coordination of governmental, private sector, trade union and other relevant statistical efforts to this end, including in the above areas. The following glossary of terms is derived from ILO, Glossary for Decent Work in Global Supply Chains (2016). This was prepared to facilitate the General Discussion on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains at the 105th Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2016, and is not intended to provide an authoritative interpretation of the terms.

Collective bargaining: Defined by the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154), as “all negotiations which take place between an employer, a group of employers or one or more employers’ organisations, on the one hand, and one or more workers’ organisations, on the other”. Collective bargaining involves determining working conditions and terms of employment, as well as regulating relations between employers and workers.

Corporate social responsibility: A broad term for enterprises’ voluntarily self-regulating initiatives to assess and take responsibility for the company’s effects on environmental, economic and social wellbeing.

Decent work: The term was first launched in the Report of the Director-General at the 1999 International Labour Conference (87th Session). It is built on four pillars: employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue. These four elements comprise the ILO Decent Work Agenda.

► Acronyms and abbreviations

ACT	Action, Collaboration, Transformation
ACTRAV	Bureau for Workers' Activities
ADB	Asian Development Bank
API	Indonesia Textile Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural & Advancement Committee
CSO	civil society organization
EPIC	Equal Pay International Coalition
EPZ	export processing zone
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
EVFTA	European Union-Vietnam FTA
FSB-Garteks KSBSI	Federation of Garment, Handicraft, Textile and Industrial Centers of the Indonesian Labour Union Confederation (Federasi Serikat Buruh Garmen, Kerajinan, Tekstil, Kulit dan Sentra Industri dan Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Seluruh Indonesia)
GFA	Global Framework Agreement
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH)
GPN	global production network
GTF	garment, textile and footwear
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IOE	International Organisation of Employers
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
MOU	memorandum of understanding

NGO	non-governmental organization
NSSF	National Social Security Fund [Cambodia]
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSH	occupational safety and health
PTA	preferential trade agreement
SAC	Sustainable Apparel Coalition
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UMFCC	Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

► Glossary

The following glossary of terms is derived from ILO, *Glossary for Decent Work in Global Supply Chains* (2016). This was prepared to facilitate the General Discussion on Decent Work in Global Supply Chains at the 105th Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2016, and is not intended to provide an authoritative interpretation of the terms.

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Decent work: The term was first launched in the Report of the Director-General at the 1999 International Labour Conference (87th Session). It is built on four pillars: employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue. These four elements comprise the ILO Decent Work Agenda.

Global supply chains: Refers to the cross-border organization of the activities required to produce goods or services and bring them to consumers through inputs and various phases of development, production and delivery.

Informal economy: All economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements.

International labour standards: Legal instruments drawn up by the ILO constituents (governments, employers and workers) and setting out basic principles and rights at work. They are either Conventions, which are legally binding international treaties that may be ratified by Member States, or Recommendations, which serve as non-binding guidelines.

Living wage: While there is no universally accepted definition of a living wage, the idea behind it is that workers and their families should at least be able to lead a simple but decent life considered acceptable by society, in light of its level of economic development. They should be able to live above the poverty line and be able to participate in social and cultural life.

Social dialogue: The term that describes the involvement of workers, employers and governments in decision-making on employment and workplace issues. It includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information among representatives of these groups on common interests in economic, labour and social policy.

Social protection: The set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of healthcare; and the provision of benefits for families with children.

Tripartism: The interaction of government, employers and workers (through their representatives) as equal and independent partners to seek solutions to issues of common concern. The ILO's structure is based on this principle.



► Introduction

This paper has been produced as part of the Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains in Asia project of the ILO, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) under its regional strategy for Asia and the Pacific 2016–2021. The project aims to “move the needle” towards gender equality, women’s empowerment and decent work in the Asian garment sector in the post-COVID-19 context by the following means:

- contribute to regional analysis, discourse and multi-stakeholder cooperation to these ends; and
- inform the development of a regional multi-stakeholder road map for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment within garment supply chains in Asia.⁹

Recognizing that the broader global supply chain context includes cotton and textile production as well as garment manufacturing and retail, this paper focuses primarily on the status and advancement of the women who comprise the majority of workers formally employed in the ready-made garment manufacturing sector in Asia. Particular attention is given to the experience of four countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam¹⁰. While it does not represent a specific in-depth focus, this paper also highlights the fact that millions of informal workers across Asia, most of whom are also women, constitute a vital part of the broader sector landscape.

Three important elements of the relevant global landscape have together helped shape this paper:

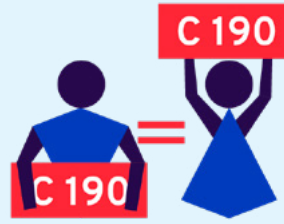
1. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified gender disparities and dynamics. Women workers are disproportionately affected by the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and can also be expected to be at the centre of post-crisis changes that will emerge within the sector.
2. The climate crisis is accelerating, with profound concomitant implications for women working within global and regional garment sector supply chains.
3. The “future of work” is rapidly evolving, driven by technological innovation, by demographic shifts and globalization, and by environmental and climate change. At the same time, deep inequalities persist, with profound implications for governments, employers, workers, and the very nature and future of work (ILO 2019d).

⁹ The Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains in Asia project aims to contribute to improved working conditions and rights of workers, as well as to improved productivity, social dialogue, gender equality and environmental sustainability in the garment sector in Asia. At a broader level, the project provides concrete follow-up to the resolution adopted in 2016 by the International Labour Conference concerning decent work in global supply chains (ILO 2016b).

¹⁰ The paper was drafted and finalized before the 1 February 2021 military coup and subsequent crisis in Myanmar. These developments have gravely affected any possibility of follow-up action in Myanmar on the lines recommended by the paper.

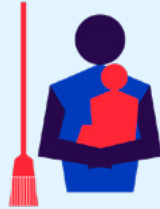


pay equity



discrimination, violence and harassment

unpaid care, managing work and family responsibilities (including care support and maternity and paternity provision)



women's voice, leadership and representation in industry decision-making

In this context, four strategic gender themes underpin the paper:

1. pay equity;
2. discrimination, violence and harassment;
3. unpaid care, managing work and family responsibilities (including care support and maternity and paternity provision); and
4. women's voice, leadership and representation in industry decision-making.

Each of these themes points to longstanding and deep-seated gender inequality issues both within the sector and in the broader world of work. These issues existed prior to COVID-19, but they can be expected to worsen in response to the pandemic and within the emerging recovery phase.

The paper is divided into two parts:

- Part 1 sets the scene by drawing on available data and analysis to examine the current status of women and key trends and gender dynamics in Asia's garment sector, including within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam as examples, this section focuses on the four strategic gender themes highlighted above. Also examined are:
 - i. the links between gender equality, labour rights, environmental sustainability and climate change; and

- ii. the unfolding trend towards increased technological upgrading, and the implications this brings for women workers in the sector.

- Part 2 draws on examples and lessons from current and past initiatives and processes in the garment supply chain to propose a set of key messages, a theory of change and recommendations for "moving the needle" within the sector in Asia. Of particular importance is the role that social dialogue can play – at all levels – in bringing key sector stakeholders together around shared priorities and commitments concerning the future direction of the sector.

The ILO (2019a) centenary report *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality* affirmed the need for dedicated actions to close the prevailing gender gaps and to seize the opportunities presented by the changing world of work. Now more than ever, with the prevailing COVID-19 crisis, the importance of taking action to close these gender gaps is critical to maintaining prior gains towards gender equality and to building back a more sustainable sector – one that is resilient, equitable and productive. The Quantum Leap report suggests this means "bold commitments must translate into concrete transformative laws, policies and practices that remove stereotypes, value women's and men's work equally and open the door to women to sit at the [decision-making] table with equal power" (ILO 2019a, 107).





Part 1 Women powering the garment sector

► 1.1 Status of women, key trends and gender dynamics in Asia's garment sector

Table 1 below provides a brief overview of the garment, textile and footwear (GTF) sector in each of the four focus countries, including women's participation in the sector. The table also offers selected gender and development indicators for each country to serve as a starting point for the examination below of the status of women and gender dynamics in Asia's garment sector.

► Table 1. Garment sector snapshot: Four focus countries

Cambodia	Indonesia
Number of GTF sector workers: 1 million (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020) 1	Number of garment/ footwear workers: 4.3 million (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020) 1
Proportion of women workers: 89% (CARE International 2020b)	Proportion of women workers: 58% (ILO 2019g)
Share of GTF sector jobs in total employment: 11.4% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	Share of GTF sector jobs in total employment: 3.6% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
Share of GTF jobs in female employment: 18.7% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)the Pacific	Share of GTF jobs in female employment: 58% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
GTF sector as share of goods exports (2019): 59.4% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	GTF sector as share of goods exports (2019): 10.4% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
GTF sector share in manufacturing value added (latest available year): Not available	GTF sector share in manufacturing value added (latest available year): 8.4% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
Gender pay gap (adjusted 2): 13% (ILO 2018b)	Gender pay gap (adjusted 2): Negligible (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019)
Main investment source in sector: China. (ILO 2017e)	Main investment source in sector: Republic of Korea (Better Work 2019a)
Maternity/paternity leave (paid): 90 days, no paid paternity leave (Better Factories Cambodia 2019)	Maternity/paternity leave (paid): maternity three months/paternity two days (Act No. 13/2003, arts 82 and 93(4)(e)). Male civil servants eligible for one month (University of Sydney 2019b)
Gender Inequality Index global rank (2018): 114th (UNDP, n.d.-a)	Gender Inequality Index global rank (2018): 103th (UNDP, n.d.-a)
Human Development Index global rank (2018): 146th (UNDP, n.d.-b)	Human Development Index global rank (2018): 111th (UNDP, n.d.-a)
Labour force participation: (2017): F76.4% (ILO, n.d.-g); M 86.8% (ILO, n.d.-g)	Labour force participation (2019): F 54% (ILO, n.d.-g); M 82.4% (ILO, n.d.-g)

Myanmar	Viet Nam
Number of GTF sector workers: 1.2 million (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020) 1	Number of garment sector workers: 2.2 million (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020) 1
Proportion of women workers: 86% (ILO 2020b)	Proportion of women workers: 80% (Better Work 2019a)
Share of GTF sector jobs in total employment: 5.3% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	Share of GTF sector jobs in total employment: 4.4% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
Share of GTF jobs in female employment: 11% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	Share of GTF jobs in female employment: 7.1% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
GTF sector as share of goods exports (2019): 30.5% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	GTF sector as share of goods exports (2019): 23.5% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
GTF sector share in manufacturing value added (latest available year): 23% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)	GTF sector share in manufacturing value added (latest available year): 15.6% (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020)
Gender pay gap (adjusted 2): 9% (Huynh 2016)	Gender pay gap: \$0.19 per hour (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019)
Main investment sources in sector: Republic of Korea (EuroCham Myanmar 2019)	Main investment sources in sector: Republic of Korea/ Taiwan (China) (Better Work Vietnam 2019a)
Maternity leave (paid): 14 weeks, paid paternity leave 15 days (ILO 2017c)	Maternity leave (paid): 4–6 months (Labour Code 1994, art. 114); paid paternity leave: 5–14 days (University of Sydney 2019b)
Gender Inequality Index global rank (2018): 106th (UNDP, n.d.-a)	Gender Inequality Index global rank (2018): 68th (UNDP, n.d.-a)
Human Development Index global rank (2018): 145th (UNDP, n.d.-a)	Human Development Index global rank (2018): 118th (UNDP, n.d.-a)
Labour force participation (2017): F 45.8% (ILO, n.d.-g); M 75.5% (ILO, n.d.-g)	Labour force participation (2019): F 62.3% (ILO, n.d.-g); M 75.4% (ILO, n.d.-g)

► The majority of workers in most garment-producing countries in the region are women. The industry employs 5.2 per cent of all working women in the region and 27.9 per cent of all women working in manufacturing.

1.1.1 Garment sector supply chains: Major source of employment in Asia and the Pacific

Before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, the GTF industry in Asia and the Pacific had an export value of US\$601 billion, representing 60 per cent of the value of the industry globally (ILO 2019g). In 2019, the industry employed an estimated 65 million garment sector workers, including both formal and informal employment, accounting for 75 per cent of GTF workers worldwide (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020). Within the region, GTF employment accounted for 3–4 per cent of total employment, compared with an average employment share of 1.6 per cent in other regions. At a subregional level, the share of workers in total employment was highest in South Asia (4.3 per cent), followed by South-East Asia and the Pacific (3.7 per cent) and East Asia (2.6 per cent). The industry further accounted for 21.1 per cent of all manufacturing employment in Asia and the Pacific.

The majority of workers in most garment-producing countries in the region are women. The industry employs 5.2 per cent of all working women in the region and 27.9 per cent of all women working in manufacturing. In Cambodia, almost one in five women in employment are employed in garment production. In Myanmar, the figure is one in nine women. In all, 35 million women in Asia and the Pacific work in the GTF sector (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020).

Only in India and Pakistan does the industry employ more men than women, reflecting the broadly lower female participation rates in their labour markets.¹¹ In India, a 2017 ILO report showed that 40 per cent of the factory-based workforce was female, although the proportion of female workers was steadily increasing and home-based garment production was disproportionately female (ILO 2017d). In Pakistan,

men accounted for two-thirds of all GTF jobs in the period up until 2017; although the industry was also employing an increasingly greater share of women, with an average annual employment growth for women of 10 per cent, outpacing the men's rate of 4.3 per cent (Huynh 2017a).

As in other regions, the GTF industry in Asia is part of a historical trend that has seen garment manufacturing for export emerge as a key driver of economic and social development. The industry has provided an entry point into formal employment for significant proportions of the population, particularly women migrating from rural areas. Foreign investment has been a primary driver of garment manufacturing in some countries, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. In others, such as Bangladesh and India, domestic investment has been a more important source of sector financing. Some Asian economies have become highly reliant on the industry for generating foreign exchange. The textile and garment sector produces more than 80 per cent of Bangladesh's exports; 80 per cent of Cambodia's; 55 per cent of India's and more than 50 per cent of Pakistan's (Niinimäki 2020; ILO 2019g).

 The industry has provided an entry point into formal employment for significant proportions of the population, particularly women migrating from rural areas.

¹¹ ILO calculations based on the latest available labour force survey data indicate that males account for 61 per cent of the total combined GTF workforce in Pakistan (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2018) and 68 per cent in India (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation 2018). The calculations are based on the [International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities \(ISIC\)](#) 13–15. This category includes wearing apparel, textiles and footwear/leather products. (In)formality in the data refers to (in)formality by nature of job, as opposed to (in)formality by unit of production (ILO, n.d.-a).

1.1.2 Feminization of employment and discrimination: Key features of the sector

Feminization of employment

In most Asian countries, the industry has developed around a model based on low-cost, low-skilled female labour for markets mainly in the United States of America, Europe and Japan. At the same time, China is emerging as the world's largest market for garments (McKinsey & Company 2019). A key feature of this model, as exemplified by each of the focus countries, has been the feminization of employment as garment companies respond to intense global competition by engaging in an ongoing search for low-cost female labour in areas such as stitching and sewing. In Indonesia, the process of workforce feminization took place in the 1970s and 1980s, during the emergence of large-scale factory-based export production (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019). This process saw garment factories actually releasing male sewing-machine operators and taking on new female workers as they shifted to export production (Silvey 2003). Cambodia, where the sector grew rapidly from the early 1990s, has seen occupational segregation, with lower-skilled sewing jobs filled almost exclusively by young, rural women with limited education. The industry relies on abundant and relatively cheap women's labour plus women's compliance with existing gender norms (ILO 2012).

By comparison, a nine-country ILO study on gender pay gaps within the garment sector in Asia shows that men are generally more concentrated in higher paid occupations (Huynh 2016a).

International apparel brands

A key factor in the prevailing garment supply chain model is the power dynamics surrounding the role of the international apparel brands and retailers who outsource production to sites in low-wage countries. As described in a report to the 2016 International Labour Conference, the garment and footwear industry traditionally relies on buyer-driven global value chains where "producers are bound by the decisions of retailers and brand-name companies" (ILO 2016b, para. 19). Wages and working time are "affected by the terms of purchasing between the buyer and its suppliers, which often reflect the asymmetrical bargaining position of the two partners and the power of the buyers to switch suppliers. Negotiated prices between the buyer and suppliers may not always cover costs. In these conditions, wages become the adjustment variable at the end of the supply chain, with competitive pressures leading to lower wages and longer working hours" (ILO 2016b, para. 65). For example, one report estimated that labour costs constitute only 0.6 per cent of the total retail price of a T-shirt (Lally, Miller, and Hohenegger 2016).

In this context, labour violations in the manufacturing phase are not simply a factory-level problem that can be improved by local compliance monitoring. They are also an outcome of an industry dominated by lead firms whose business model is predicated on outsourcing apparel production via highly flexible, volatile and cost-sensitive subcontracting networks (Anner, Bair, and Blasi 2013). The United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights clearly stipulate the responsibility of business entities to respect human rights within all business enterprises wherever they operate. This responsibility exists independently of the ability and/or willingness of governments to fulfil their own human rights obligations under international law (OHCHR 2011).



Informal workers

While the focus of this paper is on formal employment in garment manufacturing, it is important to keep in view the millions of informal workers in the sector across Asia. Whether home-based or working for small enterprises that subcontract to larger suppliers, informal workers face higher risks from violations of labour and

environmental standards, and are often left unaccounted for in deliberations about the future of the industry (ILO 2021; Stotz and Kane 2015). This mainly female workforce across the region works in highly vulnerable and precarious conditions, typically without access to social security, labour law coverage, healthcare or minimum wage coverage (see box 1 below).

► Box 1 Women in informal garment sector employment face increased vulnerability

Globally, women's employment is overwhelmingly informal¹, with limited (if any) legal or social protection. In low-income countries, 92 per cent of women work informally, compared to 87 per cent of men. Contributing family workers, usually considered unpaid, account for 28.1 per cent of women's informal employment, compared to 8.7 per cent for men. In South-East Asia, informal workers comprise an estimated 78 per cent of the total working population.

Across Asia and the Pacific, women are also more likely to be engaged in informal and vulnerable work in sectors hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, including textile and garment production. Women workers in vulnerable employment have often been the first to lose their incomes and are often among the last to recover. In many cases, a return to work is rendered less possible because of increased unpaid care work demands.

Women in informal employment are also more vulnerable as a result of being largely outside the cover of national social protection systems. A recent UN report on the status of social protection in Asia and the Pacific indicates that maternity, unemployment, sickness and disability benefits – all mainly covered by contributory schemes – remain the preserve of workers in formal employment. In Cambodia, only 6 per cent of informally employed workers have access to at least one form of social security. Informal enterprises were furthermore disqualified from government COVID-19 relief, a move that was justified on the basis of incentivizing informal firms to register formally. In Viet Nam, only 0.1 per cent of own-account workers and 0.3 per cent of contributing family workers contribute to a social protection scheme. In Myanmar, even those in formal employment can find themselves in vulnerable positions, with over 60 per cent of employment contracts, where they exist, being for less than six months. Due to the contraction of formal sector employment during the pandemic, informal employment is expected to grow as workers who have lost their jobs seek alternative means to generate income for themselves and their families.

Before COVID-19, women informal workers in low and middle-income countries reported that childcare responsibilities limited their participation, productivity and earnings. School closures and having family members returning home due to factory closures intensified their unpaid care and domestic workloads and reduced earnings. At the same time, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the urgency of measures to prevent the pandemic having a disproportionate impact on women informal workers. The following three key priorities stand out in this respect:

- extending access to social protection for informal workers;
- ensuring the rights and safety of essential informal workers; and
- supporting informal workers' organizations.

In the latter context, HomeNet South Asia, representing over 800,000 home-based workers, has called for economic recovery funds to go to all informal workers and to support home-based workers' cooperatives. Specific demands include interest-free loans as well as public investments in childcare, healthcare and social protection to allow home-based workers to get back to work. For those in global supply chains, HomeNet South Asia is calling on garment sector brands and large corporations to extend minimum wages and social protections to home-based workers.

Sources: ESCAP and ILO 2020; Lai 2020; ILO 2020b; Moussié and Staab 2020.

¹ The ILO Glossary of Statistical Terms states that informal employment comprises persons who in their main job are one of the following: (1) own-account workers, employers or members of producers' cooperatives employed in their own informal economy enterprises; (2) own account workers engaged in the production of goods exclusively for own final use by their household; (3) contributing family workers, irrespective of whether they work in formal or informal economy enterprises; or (4) employees holding informal jobs, whether employed by formal sector enterprises, informal economy enterprises, or as paid domestic workers by households (ILO, n.d.-b).

Formal employment of women: Benefits versus disadvantages

Feminist literature has engaged in considerable debate regarding the benefits versus the disadvantages of formal employment for women in Asia's garment sector. Gunseli Berik (2017, 194) observes that "whereas early macrostructural analyses problematized the low pay, the gruelling pace of work, and the delivery of maximum profit to employers with meagre benefits for women workers, later studies emphasized the gains that women workers enjoy as well as the agency they practice in their creative attempts to make a living in contexts characterized by extreme poverty and limited employment opportunities for women." Naila Kabeer (2004) draws on field work in Bangladesh and empirical studies to emphasize the benefits of such employment for women. She argues that for women in the global South, employment such as that provided in garment factories can represent genuine opportunities, especially in situations where there is no social safety net and the main alternatives for informal work offer far worse prospects. At the same time, Stephanie Barrientos and Barbara Evers (2013) argue that the evidence of the past three-plus decades demonstrates that women's increased participation in the labour force has not automatically triggered

their "emancipation". The gender inequalities that pervade wider society continue to be reflected in the exposure of women workers to additional forms of subordination, including their inferior status as workers, pervasive sexual harassment and intensification of their working day. Wherever the overall and individual balances lie between benefit and disadvantage across the sector, most commentators agree that poor working conditions in garment factories across Asia are intensified for women, who are largely concentrated in a narrow range of low-skilled and low-paid positions. As discussed in section 1.3 below, common issues include the following: arbitrary dismissals of pregnant workers; stereotypes regarding women's abilities and their supposedly more docile attitudes, which intensify gender segregation; exposure to violence and harassment in the workplace; work-related physical and mental health issues; barriers to participation in supervisory, managerial and leadership positions; and disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid care work within their households, compounding their daily work burden in comparison to that of men. The gender division of labour on the factory floor thus reflects and intertwines with gendered roles and responsibilities in the home and wider society (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019).





Relationship between gender equality and productivity

Various studies have identified links between increased productivity and greater gender diversity in the workplace. A study conducted by the ILO (2020n) in Indonesia, for example, showed that the majority of surveyed enterprises (77 per cent) agreed that gender diversity helped enhance their business outcomes (the figure for Asia and the Pacific as a whole is 68 per cent). Among the enterprises surveyed, manufacturing enterprises were the most likely to report better business outcomes (83 per cent). Among the Indonesian enterprises that reported better business outcomes, 66 per cent reported increased profitability and productivity, among other benefits. A study in Myanmar on the benefits to both workers and employers of appropriate and affordable quality childcare services (IFC 2019) showed that the provision of such services increased productivity; a result linked to factors such as a more motivated and committed workforce and reduced absenteeism. Globally, the Better Work programme of the ILO

and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) has shown that female supervisors trained by Better Work achieved a 22 per cent increase in productivity on their line and that a workplace free of harassment also leads to higher profitability (Better Work, n.d.). Other studies have shown the negative effects of gender inequality in the workplace. A CARE International (2017) survey conducted in Cambodian garment factories estimated that the productivity cost of sexual harassment in the country's garment industry was US\$89 million per annum. A further CARE International (2020a) study in Viet Nam's garment and footwear sector showed that workplace conditions that induce prolonged anxiety and insecurity, coupled with gender-based violence, were reducing the productivity of workers by 31–54 per cent.¹²

¹² Productivity was self-assessed and scored by workers on a scale of 1–100 and converted to a percentage.

► 1.2 Women in Asia's garment sector bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic

Sector overview: Uncertain future for women workers

The ILO Monitor on COVID-19 and the world of work (2020i) indicates that overall employment losses as a result of the pandemic have been greater among women than among men. It also shows workers in developing and emerging economies have been affected to a much greater extent than in past crises. Key factors in this regard include the greater impact of the crisis on informal workers (where most women workers are concentrated globally); the more limited role played by public sector employment; and resource constraints on the implementation of COVID-19 response measures. The report highlights the need for policy measures to provide the fullest possible support for vulnerable and hard-hit groups, including diverse groups of women, migrants, young people and informal workers.

These findings are reflected in Asia's garment sector supply chains, which are highly integrated into the global economy. Across the region, impacts of the pandemic have intensified workload inequalities, occupational segregation, and the distribution of unpaid care work and earnings among the majority female workforce (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020). The concentration of women in lower-paid and lower-skilled jobs in the sector mean that they are disproportionately vulnerable to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, which in some cases caused exports from garment-producing countries to major buying countries to fall by as much as 70 per cent. In addition to cancellations of buyer orders at the onset of the crisis, garment manufacturers also experienced disruptions of up to 60 per cent of their imported input supply (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020).

Millions of jobs affected, with the prospect of a second wave

With the permanent or temporary closure of thousands of supplier factories across the region, it is estimated that millions of women have lost their jobs on a short-term or long-term basis. Factories that have since reopened have seen reductions in their workforce. It is estimated that the typical worker lost at least two to four weeks of work overall, with only three in five being called back to the factory. Many among those still employed in the second quarter of 2020 experienced reduced incomes and delays in wage payments (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020). The global Clean Clothes Campaign estimates that the pandemic has resulted in up to US\$5.8 billion in wages being lost in the sector (Abdulla 2020). As the virus continues to threaten, risks of infection within the workplace continue to be a concern due to problems in implementing preventative measures such as physical distancing. Crowded conditions in employer-provided dormitories or off-site housing pose a further risk in some contexts (ILO 2020e).

At the same time, the prospect of a second wave of factory closures in the region's garment sector potentially threatens the jobs of millions more as, reportedly, many global brands demand price cuts and delay payments to suppliers who desperately need orders to survive. A survey of 75 factories in 15 countries found that suppliers have been asked to lower their prices by an average of 12 per cent compared to the previous year (Anner 2020). Suppliers further said that they had to wait an average of 77 days for payment, compared with 43 days before the pandemic. While new orders are coming in and some cancelled or suspended orders are being restored, overall they have totalled less than pre-COVID-19 levels. More than half of the manufacturers surveyed said they would have to close down if the "sourcing squeeze" continued.

Longer term, a decrease in demand for workers in the formal garment sector could leave millions of women seeking to survive in increasingly informal and precarious job arrangements, both within and outside the sector (see box 1 above). Women displaced from the sector may face difficulties finding opportunities elsewhere due to skills mismatches and social norms that deem certain types of work socially unacceptable (ILO 2020e). A further risk is that the low-skilled jobs occupied by women throughout the garment supply chain will not return or may be taken by men who are

given preference in a highly stressed job market, contributing to a defeminization of the sector (ILO 2020e). See box 3 below for more details.

For women who find themselves unemployed for longer periods, ILO research into previous recessions indicates possible adverse intergenerational impacts on health and education for children, particularly girls. Many women may also lose their hard-won financial independence and in some cases become dependent on their families (ILO 2020e).

► Box 2 Cambodia study illuminates extent of COVID-19 impact on women garment workers

CARE International conducted a survey in Cambodia's garment industry that illuminates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's lives.¹ The findings echo the issues facing women garment sector workers in the three other focus countries of this report.

The five biggest problems workers faced were the following:

- lack of income/loss of job (89 per cent);
- increased anxiety and mental pressure (73 per cent);
- food insecurity (41 per cent);
- mobility barriers (41 per cent); and
- increased burden of unpaid care work (13 per cent).

At the end of May 2020, 88 per cent of workers reported a reduced income as a result of COVID-19, while 50 per cent of suspended/laid-off workers in the survey were living below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day and close to the Cambodian national poverty line of 6,347 riel per day.

This dramatic loss of income intensified levels of indebtedness, already high among garment workers, further exacerbating their financial insecurity, with 53 per cent having difficulty repaying their loans.

Meanwhile, 33 per cent further reported that COVID-19 had increased tension and conflict in their homes, and 2 per cent identified domestic violence as one of the main problems created by COVID-19. CARE noted that gender-based violence is consistently under-reported, so these findings likely underestimate the real scale of this issue. The main option identified by the workers for coping with the permanent loss of a job was to return to work in their home village, either in agriculture (36 per cent) or running small businesses (33 per cent). This reverse migration back to rural areas may represent a backwards step for workers in Cambodia, who have been migrating to urban areas – Phnom Penh in particular – for the chance to earn more money and support their families in the provinces.

Source: CARE International 2020b.

¹ The qualitative survey covered 307 female garment workers from 28 May to 5 June 2020. CARE staff acted as enumerators and delivered the survey over the telephone, using Kobo Toolbox to record responses.

Pandemic spotlights importance of social protection for resilience

Governments in the region's garment-producing countries have applied an array of temporary measures ranging from economic stimulus packages to social assistance transfers. In each of the four focus countries, specific measures have included wage subsidies and the deferral of tax and social security payments. However, these have proved insufficient to stem the impact on women in the sector, their situation exacerbated by the absence of adequate social protection coverage. The ILO estimates that 71 per cent of Asia's overall population lacks access to comprehensive social protection, and that one out of every two people have no social protection at all. Only 22.5 per cent of people in the region are covered by unemployment benefits (ILO 2017b). Among those who do not have access to social protection, women are over-represented, particularly those in informal employment (see box 1 above). Without adequate social protection measures and safety nets in place, a lack of wages means that millions of workers and their families face the prospect of increased poverty and hunger (ILO 2020e). In Cambodia, for example, the estimated one in five households who depend on income generated mainly by women garment workers have faced increased pressures in meeting daily living costs (ILO 2019g). As a result, many women have become increasingly indebted through the increased use of micro loans to survive (Human Rights Watch 2020).

Increase in women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work

Pandemic-induced workplace, school and childcare facility closures have further exacerbated a situation that already saw unpaid care work as the major factor keeping women out of the workforce (ILO 2020e). Not only have women had to cope with increased unpaid childcare responsibilities, they have also had additional responsibilities as

a result of men being confined to their homes during lockdown periods or as a result of closures. The likely continuation of intensified unpaid work responsibilities for women due to COVID-19 will affect the ability of women to return to work and could lead to them dropping out of the labour force altogether. The continued scarcity of accessible, quality and publicly funded childcare arrangements in most garment-producing countries in the region only exacerbates this situation (ILO 2020e). See section 1.3.3.

Increased gender-based violence

Emerging data show that the pandemic has triggered what has been widely described as a "shadow pandemic" of gender-based violence, particularly for women. This has been linked to factors such as heightened tensions due to economic insecurity and limitations in mobility, male unemployment backlash, and women's loss of bargaining power and status at home due to decreased earnings. In addition, many migrant workers who were confined to dormitories were unable to escape their abusers. Experience of violence can impact workers' mental and physical health, as well as their attendance and performance in the workplace (ILO 2020e). See section 1.3.2.

Looking ahead: Uncertain future for women in the sector¹³

At a more general level, a CARE International (2020a) survey of 30 countries, combined with the organization's on-the-ground experience and evidence base, found that most national committees established to respond to COVID-19 do not have equal female–male representation. Among the countries surveyed that had established such committees, 74 per cent of committees had fewer than one-third female membership, and only one committee was fully equal. On average, women made up 24 per cent of such committees. In addition, 54 per cent of surveyed countries had taken no observable

¹³ Viet Nam looks set to consolidate its place in the post-COVID period as the world's second or third-largest textile and garment exporter (depending on pandemic impacts), with a major shift towards textile production stimulated by the recently signed European Union–Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). This requires Vietnamese garment manufacturers to use domestically produced fabrics (with the exception of fabrics imported from the Republic of Korea). The EVFTA is expected to boost the country's manufacturing sector and exports as it recovers from the pandemic (Nguyen and Le 2020).

action on gender-based violence, and 33 per cent did not appear to have addressed sexual and reproductive rights in their response, despite clear evidence that the crisis was intensifying these issues for women.

Anecdotal feedback from ILO country offices and other stakeholders interviewed for this paper indicated this lack of women's representation and voice is also reflected in the broader social dialogue processes within the region's garment sector. This is consistent with the already prevalent under-representation of women in leadership and decision-making roles within trade unions, employers' organizations, factory management and other institutions in the sector, as further detailed in section 1.3.4. Key barriers to women's participation in leadership and decision-making have been further intensified by the pandemic. These barriers include gender norms and stereotypes, time constraints due to family responsibilities, and a lack of leadership and career path opportunities (ILO 2020e).

Technological change a key factor in future employment of women

It is still far from clear what the garment sector will look like, either globally or regionally, in the postCOVID-19 period. However, one likely factor bearing on the prospects of women garment workers is a greater focus on technological advance, speed and agility – developments that

were already evident before the onset of the pandemic. A sector experts' survey conducted by the ILO in July of 2020 indicated that COVID-19 had accelerated such developments and the rate at which changes might be adopted (ILO 2020g).

That survey suggested a likely deepening divide between large, professionalized manufacturers and nonprofessionalized manufacturers, presenting the industry with two clearly defined and divergent paths. Stakeholders indicated that some factories were likely to become increasingly professionalized and offer more technologically advanced production. As a result, these factories would be able to support increasing demands for transparency, flexibility and agility in production processes, as well as enhanced social and environmental standards. The survey findings indicated that these developments would likely result in closer partnerships between some buyers and manufacturers, and perhaps, in more balanced power dynamics. On the other hand, the survey report points to the possibility that stretched margins will drive some factories and buyers to focus increasingly on cost-benefit calculations at the expense of other considerations. These factories are likely to encounter more significant issues related to working conditions. Women workers – given their occupational segregation and their clustering in the lowest tiers of the garment sector supply chain – are more likely to be at risk from such developments in terms of both job prospects and working conditions.



► Box 3 Technological change: Trends, challenges and defeminization

Currently, the key stages of the global garment supply chain in Asia show quite different levels of use of automation technologies. The early stages (particularly textile manufacturing) and the later stages of trading, distribution and retail, are already significantly automated. However, the factory-based garment manufacturing phase in Asia remains highly labour-intensive, with relatively limited introduction of automation technologies to date.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, various studies had indicated that new technologies would be increasingly able to digitalize and automate the routine, repetitive tasks that characterize many labour-intensive industries such as garment and footwear manufacturing. For instance, an estimated 64–88 per cent of mainly female textile, garment and footwear workers in Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam are at high risk of displacement by computer-controlled automation technologies. Recent years have seen the development of large supplier firms in Asia and the Pacific, and – given their more consistent quality, improved efficiency, ability to customize products to meet consumer demand, and increased environmental sustainability – these firms may be well positioned to invest in and benefit from automation.

However, the potential to move in this direction does not mean that the sector as a whole will necessarily follow this course. One study (Kucera and Barcia de Mattos 2020) argues that technological feasibility is not the decisive consideration in the diffusion of new automation technologies, observing that widely cited high figures for the risk of potential automation do not adequately convey the considerable technological bottlenecks involved, particularly for sewing operations in the apparel industry. The study observes that tasks that appear routine for humans may in fact be difficult for machines. The skills involved in sewing may be underestimated, perhaps because of a tendency to equate low pay with limited skill.

The high cost of technological upgrades in an industry with tight margins and shifting supplier–brand relationships present another brake on rapid technological change. The Indonesian Textile Association (API), for example, has indicated that the sector faces significant challenges with respect to ensuring improved returns on investment through the application of new technologies. Noting that only some large manufacturers have the resources needed to transform their production operations, a spokesperson for the association has warned companies to consider the impact of technologies on productivity, margins and product quality before investing.

A further factor in the current discussion on likely scenarios for the future of the sector in Asia is the possibility of accelerated moves to greater “reshoring” – bringing garment production back to the main market countries on a highly automated basis to reduce future risks of supply chain disruptions. A key consideration that mitigates against such a push is the current benefit of geographic proximity of garment factories to the materials supply chain in Asia. In addition, demographic trends are reshaping markets, with a growing Asian middle class, particularly in China, providing an important new consumer base. One plausible scenario envisions that brands maintain a dual sourcing strategy: (1) continue importing basic, low-priced products with large and stable demand, while (2) expanding increasingly automated reshored or nearshored production to manufacture higher priced and customized products.

The relationship between technological development and trends towards workforce feminization or defeminization presents a key consideration within all these developments. A 2014 study of such trends in the manufacturing sectors of 36 countries and territories found that in two textile and garment-producing territories in particular – the Republic of Korea and Taiwan (China) – significant technological upgrading was associated with declining female share in employment within the textile industry (Kucera and Tejani 2014). Several studies on the apparent preference of employers for male workers in the context of technological upgrading highlighted several potentially influential factors. These included “the lesser importance of low-wage women’s labour in capital-intensive production; gender norms designating women as bread winners and women as secondary workers, with men more likely to be in higher paid jobs; and the different skills requirements of new industrial jobs compared with the purportedly different skills of men and women workers and whether these differences are real or perceived” (Kucera and Tejani 2014, 570).

Sources: Chang, Rynhart, and Huynh 2016; Bárcia de Mattos et al. 2020; Kucera and Barcia de Mattos 2020; Kucera and Tejani 2014; Pathoni 2019.

► 1.3 Asia's garment sector through a thematic lens

1.3.1 Equal pay for work of equal value

► Box 4 Equal pay for work of equal value

The ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), affirms that women and men have the right to receive equal remuneration for work of equal value (commonly referred to as “equal pay”). Not only should men and women get equal pay for doing the same or a similar job, but also when they do work that is completely different but which, based on objective criteria, is of equal value. Equal pay is a recognized human right, to which all men and women are entitled. Convention No. 100 is closely linked to the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

SDG Target 8.5: “By 2030, 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.”

Women paid 20 per cent less than men globally

While the principle of equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value has been widely endorsed, with over 90 per cent of ILO Member States having ratified Convention No. 100 (including Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam), application in practice has been problematic. Using data covering some 70 countries and about 80 per cent of wage employees worldwide, the Global Wage Report 2018/19 (ILO 2018c) found that, globally, women continue to be paid approximately 20 per cent less than men. The report finds that in low- and middle-income countries, the gender pay gap is widest among lower-paid workers, a category in which most garment sector workers are concentrated.

The report draws on empirical evidence to show that traditional explanations, such as differences in the levels of education between women and men who work in paid employment, play a limited role in explaining gender pay gaps. Even in countries where women are more highly educated than men, they still earn lower wages in comparison, including when working in the same occupational categories. A key factor in gender

pay gaps is the undervaluation of women's work in highly feminized occupations and enterprises, such as those in the global garment sector. The report shows that for a selection of countries, the wages of both women and men tend to be lower in workplaces and occupations with a predominantly female workforce (ILO 2018c).

► A key factor in gender pay gaps is the undervaluation of women's work in highly feminized occupations and enterprises, such as those in the global garment sector.

Stephanie Sequino (2005) reinforces the point that structural factors, rather than gender gaps in education (which are themselves manifestations of discrimination), are largely responsible for persistent wage inequality. She highlights the dual phenomenon of women's segregation in export industries and the increased mobility of firms as factors that constrain women's ability to improve their wages, working conditions and job security. The concentration of women at the "very end" of global supply chains, where regulations are likely to be weakest and competitive pressures strongest, is another structural factor contributing to the gender pay gap in industries such as textiles and garments, according to a report by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ILO/ACTRAV) on the role of trade unions in closing such gaps (Rubery and Johnson 2019).

Systemic gender pay gaps characterize Asia's garment sector

While making clear comparisons between countries is complicated by data gaps and inconsistencies, available data indicate that global gender pay dynamics are reflected in Asia's garment sector. An ILO study shows that, at 18.5 per cent, the average raw gender pay gap¹⁴ in Asia's textile, garment and footwear sector is higher than the global sector average of 16 per cent (Pillay 2018).¹⁵ The regional garment sector figure encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from raw gender pay gaps of around 42.2 and 57.3 per cent in India and Pakistan, respectively, to 4.5 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively, in Cambodia and Indonesia.

The following commentary examines gender pay gaps in the garments sector of the four focus countries in greater detail, taking into account the varying degrees of availability and comparability of data in each case.

In **Cambodia**, the adjusted net wage gap in the formal sector of the economy is estimated at

around 20 per cent (ILO 2016c; ILO and ADB 2013). The unadjusted (raw) gender pay gap in the economy is estimated at 27 per cent (ILO and ADB 2013). In the broader GTF sector, adjusted data from the 2016 Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey shows that women earn 13 per cent less than men. This pay gap is driven by the apparel manufacturing subsector, which accounts for 88 per cent of employment in the GTF sector as a whole (ILO 2018b). These figures resonate with the above-mentioned raw gender pay gap of 4.5 per cent in Cambodia's GTF sector (Pillay 2018). On the other hand, female workers earned higher incomes than their male counterparts in the country's (comparatively small) textile and footwear subsector (Pillay 2018).

 AN 2018 ILO study shows that, at 18.5 per cent, the average raw gender pay gap in Asia's textile, garment and footwear sector is higher than the global sector average of 16 per cent (Pillay 2018).

¹⁴ "Raw gender wage gap data" refer to the earnings of men minus the earnings of women. These can be calculated for average wages, median wages or wages in different places in the distribution. The fact that women earn less than men is a nearly universal feature of labour markets around the world.

¹⁵ The countries covered by the analysis in this research note include the major GTF producers in developing Asia, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The analysis presented in this research note is based on nationally representative labour force surveys conducted by the national statistical offices of the respective countries. The labour force survey methodology allows for data to be disaggregated by sex and industrial sector, which allows for an appropriate classification.

In **Indonesia**, the more broadly adjusted mean gender pay gap, based on hourly wages, is 20.2 per cent. Based on monthly wages, this rises to 23.1 per cent. The equivalent mean raw figures are 7.8 per cent, hourly, and 17.8 per cent monthly (ILO 2018c). A 2016 ILO study indicates a raw gender pay gap in the garment sector of approximately 10 per cent (Cowgill and Huynh 2016). However, adjusted figures in the same study indicate no significant difference in pay or in weekly working hours between men and women (Cowgill and Huynh 2016). This finding reflects industrywide estimates that include adjustments for a broad range of factors, including demographic, educational, geographical, sub-industry and occupational variances by gender. An impact evaluation of the ILO/IFC Better Work programme in Indonesia (among other countries) remarks that while this seems to contradict the assumption that feminization of the garment industry results from women's lesser labour cost relative to men, it reveals the extent to which employers' preference for female workers in Indonesia can be shaped by gender stereotypes

(such as notions of female manual dexterity and supposed docility), rather than cost savings as such (Djaya 2019).

Available data for **Myanmar** indicate that the adjusted gender pay gap "outside the GTF sector" is about 20 per cent (Huynh 2016b). Specific data for the garment manufacturing sector are unavailable. However, for the GTF sector as a whole (of which garment manufacturing accounts for about 50 per cent, in employment terms), data based on average daily wage for all employees show that men tend to earn about 10 per cent more than women. When controlling for other factors such as age, marital status, education, experience, geographic location, subsector, occupation and firm dynamics, women still face a wage gap of nearly 9 per cent (Huynh 2016b).

In **Viet Nam**, the adjusted mean pay gap for the broader economy based on hourly wages is estimated at 11.4 per cent. Based on monthly wages, the broader gender gap is 12.5 per cent (ILO 2018c).¹⁶ In raw figures, the estimated mean gender gaps are 7.7 per cent (hourly wages) and 10.5 per cent (monthly). This compares with

► Box 5 Piece rate pay systems present risks for garment workers

The high prevalence of piece rate pay in the garment sector is another factor affecting workers' income levels and well-being. A Better Work study of the impact of piece rates on wages and working conditions in garment export factories in five countries – Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua and Viet Nam – observed that workers relying on piece rate wages often constitute a vulnerable section of the workforce. Many piece rate workers are women, and many work in the informal economy. The study found that while piece rate pay could serve as an effective pay method, it often presented significant risks for employees, particularly those under a partial piece rate system, who appeared to be worse off than those working either 100 per cent for hourly wages or 100 per cent by the piece. Partial piece rate workers were found to be more concerned about the possibility of low pay, probably due to the lack of clarity in wage setting procedures. This uncertainty also adversely affected physical and mental health. Piece rate employment was also found to often be more strenuous because individuals were incentivized to work harder, increasing the risk of injuries, accidents and other health-related problems. Partial piece rate pay workers, in particular, were also more likely subject to sexual harassment and verbal abuse. While highlighting the need for further research in this area, the study concluded that the extent to which piece rate pay could work as a fair and effective pay system depended on careful piece rate pay design. To avoid decent work deficits related to piece rate pay, government regulation was seen as necessary to ensure, for example, that pieceworkers' wages were not lower than the applicable minimum wage. Source: Borino 2018.

¹⁶ Part-time work, one focus of the report, contributes to a difference between hourly and monthly wage estimates of gender pay gaps. Noting the diverse reasons for working part-time, the report suggests that if a large proportion of women are working part-time out of necessity rather than choice, any estimate of the gender pay gap using monthly earnings also implicitly takes account of the cost to women of fewer full-time work opportunities. The report further notes that many women may choose to work part-time because domestic chores and care responsibilities continue to fall mainly on their shoulders.

an estimated gender pay gap in the garment sector of about US\$0.19 per hour (equivalent to a gap of about 19 per cent), with no significant difference in average weekly hours of work between women and men (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019). One potential explanation cited for this discrepancy is that women systematically receive lower attendance and productivity bonuses compared to men. Such bonuses are based on attendance and performance records. Because they are voluntary in nature and, in most cases, exclude leave days that are only provided to women for menstruation, prenatal, maternity and birth-control, they end up by disproportionately penalizing women (Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019).

Minimum wages an important factor in addressing the gender pay gap

Take-home pay levels for women in Asia's garment factories are further held back by low minimum wages, which according to the ILO (2016b), fail to fulfil the needs of workers and their families. This situation is compounded by low levels of minimum wage compliance by some employers (Cowgill and Huynh 2016). These two factors contribute to long working hours as workers strive to generate enough income to support themselves and their families. At approximately 2,300 hours per year, working hours in Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam in the pre-COVID-19 period were among the highest among garment-producing countries worldwide (Hult 2016). In Viet Nam, a recent study by the Fair Labor Association shows that, despite increases in the level of minimum wages, many workers did more than 50 hours of overtime a month to earn a living in the pre-COVID-19 period. Overtime violations in Viet Nam ranked well above the global average, according to the study (Chen 2019).

The influence of minimum wage levels on the gender pay gap goes beyond issues of compliance. Even when upgraded through sectoral collective bargaining, the negotiated rates in female-dominated sectors tend to be far from adequate, and only applicable to the formal economy outside export processing zones, or EPZs (Rubery and Mathew 2019). In recent years, living wage initiatives have become increasingly prominent in this context, with varying views about definitions

and approach. ILO/ACTRAV observes that such initiatives typically bring together trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to highlight low wages and poverty and to agree on purchasing power parity-adjusted living wage rates that are compatible with a basic but decent standard of living balanced with production viability (Bhattacharjee and Roy 2012). The Clean Clothes Campaign further argues that a gender-sensitive approach to living wages requires the inclusion of care work considerations, taking into account the role of women in garment-producing countries to support their extended families (Luginbhul 2019).

Gender pay gaps and the labour market

Taking a broader perspective, ILO/ACTRAV argues that gender pay equality is more likely to be achieved within inclusive and egalitarian labour markets (Rubery and Mathew 2019). Trade unions and collective regulation have a central role to play in this context. ILO/ACTRAV have found that a number of key practices contribute to raising women's relative and absolute pay levels. These include:

- raising the minimum wage to a living wage for all workers;
- extending trade union organizing to include disadvantaged groups;
- extending the legal applicability of collective bargaining agreements; and
- narrowing the range of collectively negotiated minimum wages by raising them all to a higher level.

Noting that trade unions are active in all these areas, even if their involvement is not specifically described as such, ILO/ACTRAV also observes that greater overall equality enhances the effectiveness of specific measures in closing the gender pay gap. The principle of equal pay for work of equal value presupposes an internally fair and consistent pay structure. Where significant wage inequality prevails between firms and sectors, however, pressures likely exist that make such a fair pay structure difficult to maintain (Rubery and Mathew 2019).

ILO/ACTRAV also highlights the importance of coordinated efforts to improve pay and working conditions in female-dominated supply chain segments that span international systems of regulation, and hence often suffer from a “governance deficit” (Rubery and Mathew 2019). Lack of enforcement along the supply chain has thus far limited efforts to improve wages, reduce gender pay gaps and address other areas of focus. One recent development in this regard has been the emergence of Global Framework Agreements (GFAs), which are increasingly extending into female-dominated economic sectors, including the garment sector (see box 22 below). Such agreements can provide mechanisms for improving women workers’ pay in global supply chains through negotiation between multinational corporations and international trade unions or trade union federations.

At the same time, a number of international garment brands, as part of corporate social responsibility commitments, have taken their own initiatives in improving wages at the individual company level. One report on such initiatives observes, however, that while there may have been signs of progress in some cases, the following obstacles undermine the effectiveness of this approach:

- ▶ lack of transparency with respect to the outsourcing of production;
- ▶ lack of living wage benchmarks and roadmaps;
- ▶ reliance on flawed social auditing approaches for compliance and enforcement of commitments; and
- ▶ weak enforcement of freedom of association rights, which disempowers workers with regard to raising concerns about unmet wage commitments (Edwards, Hunt, and LeBaron 2019).

Other assessments (Sherman 2009; Deegan 2002; Laufer 2003) have highlighted additional issues:

- ▶ lack of accountability inherent in the voluntary nature of corporate social responsibility approaches;
- ▶ inconsistency in the way companies measure and present findings;
- ▶ a tendency to blur accurate reporting with corporate public relations (and to downplay negative findings); and
- ▶ varying interpretations of what “sustainability” means in this context.

1.3.2 Workplace discrimination, violence and harassment

► Box 6 Workplace discrimination violence and harassment

The **ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)**, addresses all forms of discrimination in the world of work on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction and social origin. It also establishes the possibility of extending protection to tackle discrimination on the basis of other criteria. Additional grounds that have been added by a number of countries, including real or perceived HIV status, sexual orientation and gender identity, family responsibilities, disability, age and nationality.

Adopted in June 2019, the **ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206), 2019**, are the first international labour standards to provide a common framework to prevent, remedy and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment. The Convention includes the specific recognition, for the first time in international law, of the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, and sets out the obligation to respect, promote and realize this right. Among other things, the Convention and the Recommendation recognize that preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work requires members to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work as well as to promote decent work (ILO 2020j). Convention No. 190 has taken on additional salience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered a rise of gender-based violence and harassment and further exacerbated gender stereotypes and harmful masculinities, leading to increased unpaid care work for women. Convention No. 190 sets out specific measures to address gender-based violence and harassment in such a context (ILO 2020c).

SDG Target 5.1: “End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.”

SDG Target 5.2: “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”

SDG Target 10.3: “Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard”

Gender-based discrimination is pervasive across the garment sector at all levels

Although the dynamics of global garment production outsourcing have changed over the decades, gender-based discrimination remains systemic within the sector as a result of factors such as unequal power relations between women and men, gender stereotyping, conscious and unconscious gender bias, gender-related occupational segregation and undervaluing of “women’s work”. Such factors underpin gender-based discrimination across all aspects of the garment supply chain, both vertically and horizontally. As discussed in section 1.3.4, gender-based discrimination is also pervasive at the leadership and management levels in garment factories, employers’ organizations, sectoral organizations and trade unions. Gendered socialization combined with the exploitation

of women in the workplace thus constitutes women’s labour as a low-cost source of value creation and value capture (Barrientos and Evers 2013).

Sexual harassment and violence: A shadow pandemic

The impacts in practice of such discrimination within Asia’s garment sector supply chains are nowhere more starkly highlighted than by the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence within the sector – not just within the workplace but also during the commute to and from work. A Better Work global report makes clear that the unequal power relations between female and male staff that frequently characterize the sector, with management and supervisory positions more likely to be held by men, can mean that business pressures lead to

Gender-based discrimination remains systemic within the sector as a result of such factors as unequal power relations between women and men, gender stereotyping, conscious and unconscious gender bias, gender-related occupational segregation and undervaluing of “women’s work”.

women workers being “subjected to bullying and verbal and physical abuse as a means to intimidate or, perversely, motivate them to reach production targets” (Better Work 2019b, 7). Misaligned pay incentives and structures are also linked to the likelihood of sexual harassment, particularly when garment workers are on piece rate pay within production targets set by their line supervisors.

In 2015, a CARE International survey conducted in garment factories in **Cambodia** found that almost one in three women reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace in the previous 12 months (CARE International 2017). A follow-up survey in 2018 found the prevalence of violence was 57 per cent higher than it had been in 2015 (CARE International, n.d.). Better Work baseline worker surveys in Cambodia further revealed that quid pro quo sexual harassment was a widespread issue faced by women garment workers, with 22 per cent of respondents reporting that job benefits had been offered in exchange for sexual favours or a sexual relationship (Better Work 2019b). The CARE International (2017) report estimated that the productivity cost of sexual

harassment in the Cambodian garment industry was US\$89 million per annum. It concluded that acts of workplace violence affected not only direct survivors and perpetrators, but also indirect victims, factories and society at large.

Evidenced in this study, sexual harassment can discourage women and men from working (absenteeism and turnover) and reduce productivity. Furthermore, the qualitative data shows harmful and discriminatory societal norms that support victim shaming and blaming, which may prevent women from discussing or reporting harassment or violence in the workplace and community (CARE International 2017, 7).

In **Myanmar**, 42.5 per cent of women workers indicated in a survey carried out across 16 garment factories that they had been sexually harassed at work, while 40.3 per cent had been subject to harassment while traveling to and from work. Physical abuse and verbal abuse were also an issue, with 10.9 per cent and 15.6 per cent of women, respectively, reporting that they had been subject to such abuses in the workplace (ILO 2019h).

In **Indonesia**, according to a recent Better Work survey of garment factories covered by the programme, around four out of every five workers stated that sexual harassment or sexual touching was a concern in their workplace (Better Work 2019b). The following responses were collected:

- in 4.3 per cent of cases, the harassment led to strike action within the factory;
- 36.7 per cent of those who had experienced harassment discussed it with their manager or supervisor; and
- 20.9 per cent discussed it with their trade union representative.

The Better Work (2019b) report indicates that the level of sexual harassment concern reported per factory in Indonesia is significantly higher relative to other Better Work country programmes. “This suggests workers are likely more willing to voice their concerns through surveys. Moreover, workers’ responses suggest they are comfortable in doing something about their concerns, such as seeking help from their trade union representative or from their Human Resources

department. Taking such actions indicates that workers are becoming more aware of their rights and are increasingly confident about seeking help to address the issue" (Better Work 2019b, 14).

Recent research on the **Viet Nam** garment sector in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that gender-based violence in the workplace tends to increase as stress levels do, with women being at greater risk of violence than men (CARE International 2020c). The study findings showed that 19.8 per cent of female workers and 11.9 per cent of male workers in Viet Nam reported experiencing at least one form of violence in the previous six months. The data further showed that at home, the rate of violence against women has almost doubled (to 53.2 per cent) compared with the overall rate of domestic violence against women in the previous 12 months as indicated in the 2019 National Study on Violence Against Women in Viet Nam (UNFPA 2019). The CARE International (2020a) report concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift in the power balance between workers and their employers. This, coupled with a lack of information, has placed workers, especially female workers, in a more vulnerable position.

It is in this context that ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 call for an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach, recognizing the different and complementary roles and functions of governments, employers and workers in preventing, protecting and addressing violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, in the world of work (ILO 2020c). These include the ongoing development and use of national and workplace mechanisms to effectively prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work. At the societal level, such mechanisms include national laws on violence against women where they exist, as well as occupational safety and health (OSH) management systems, OSH policies and programmes, and OSH national tripartite mechanisms (ILO 2020f). At the workplace level, collective agreements and enterprise measures can provide important vehicles to both improve the scope and coverage of legislation (when such exist), and to fill the gap when legislation is non-existent. Numerous collective agreements around the world have established policies and measures to tackle violence and harassment.

Drawing on experience at factory level over several years in the sector, the Better Work programme has further developed and implemented a comprehensive workplace-based sexual harassment prevention approach (Better Work 2019b). Key elements of this are:

- establishing systems, including implementing Better Work's model anti-sexual harassment policy, providing support to set up grievance mechanisms and providing referrals to the relevant national authorities;
- tackling organizational tolerance of sexual harassment through awareness raising, including the use of animated videos, posters and 'Do's and Don'ts' checklists; and
- building capacity to prevent and respond to reports of sexual harassment through targeted training of general managers, Human Resources managers, line supervisors and workers.

Recent years have seen a growing number of enterprises adopting zero tolerance policies for sexual harassment and bullying, including when these are prompted by sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression (ILO 2019a).

Public countermeasures in face of the COVID-19 pandemic are confining many people to their homes, and this has further intensified the risk of domestic violence for garment sector workers. The ILO (2020a) observes that evidence from previous epidemics (Ebola and Zika among them) shows that violence against women tends to rise in situations where movement has been restricted. With women in abusive relationships being forced to spend more time in close contact with violent family members as a result of the pandemic, and families coping with additional stress and job losses, there is increased risk of exposure to domestic violence.

► Box 7 Indonesia garment sector programme targets domestic violence arising from COVID-19

Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the ILO/IFC Better Work programme in Indonesia was conducting “training of trainers” in sexual harassment prevention and was supporting garment factories to develop sexual harassment intervention plans. Since the onset of the pandemic, the focus of Better Work’s response in Indonesia has shifted to the stress, adverse mental health effects and increased violence facing women workers who lost their jobs or were furloughed. With schools closed and workers confined largely to their homes, women faced increased levels of domestic tension, stress, unpaid care burdens, harassment, verbal abuse and violence. Important aspects of the Better Work response included the development and dissemination of guidance on responding to stress, mental health issues and domestic violence, with an Instagram broadcast providing one channel for this response.

A key lesson learned has been the importance of responding to actual needs as they present themselves (for example, the greater prevalence and intensity of domestic violence during lockdown periods) and using accessible communication mediums such as Instagram to reach those potentially affected.

Source: Interview with staff of Better Work Indonesia programme, 19 August 2020.

1.3.3 Unpaid care work and family responsibilities, maternity protection and paternity leave

Primary impediment to women joining the workforce: Unpaid care responsibilities

Unpaid care and domestic work is a key driver of gender disparities within Asia’s garment sector, underpinned by the unequal gender division of labour and low value attributed to care work (ILO 2013). In addition to the working life challenges this brings, women’s unpaid care burden creates time poverty and limits women’s mobility and access to education and training opportunities. According to a joint ILO–Gallup (2017) report, unpaid care and domestic work is the primary barrier for women engaging in and staying in the workforce in Asia and the Pacific.

The urgency of addressing this issue is reinforced by data showing that women’s daily time spent in unpaid care work has decreased by just one minute per year over the past 15 years (ILO and Gallup 2017). ILO global estimates from national

time-use surveys show that, in 2018, men on average dedicated one hour and 23 minutes per day to unpaid care work, in comparison to women’s four hours and 25 minutes – more than three times that spent by men in such activities (ILO 2018a). In Asia and the Pacific, the ILO reports, women spent more than four times as much time on unpaid care as men – and men in Asia and the Pacific performed less unpaid care work than did those in any other region of the world.

The lack of time-use data available for the four focus countries of this paper highlights the need for greater attention collecting and providing information needed for effective government and business policymaking. The most recent available data are for Cambodia and are nearly a decade old, coming from a 2012 labour force survey.¹⁷ According to these data, women spent an average of 188 minutes per day on unpaid care work¹⁸, while men spent just 18 minutes (UNSD,

¹⁷ A previous time-use survey was conducted in Cambodia in 2003–2004. This national modular survey comprised part of the National Socio-Economic Survey carried out by the National Statistical Office.

¹⁸ Three main categories of unpaid care work are applied in the above ILO study, using disaggregated data from available time-use surveys: housework (domestic services for own final use within the household, indirect care); caregiving services to household members (direct care); and volunteer work (community care services and help to other households, both direct and indirect care).

► Box 8 Workers with family responsibilities and maternity protection

The **Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)**, aims to create “effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers” (Art. 3). The Convention seeks to promote policies to reduce work–family conflict and combat discrimination resulting from family responsibilities. Convention No. 156 guidelines on childcare at the workplace provide an important basis for stakeholder action in this regard. Together with the corresponding **Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981 (No. 165)**, Convention No. 156 opened the door to paternity and parental leave entitlements.

The **Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)**, follows up on the first **Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 003)**, which was adopted during the first International Labour Conference, and the **Maternity Protection (Revised) Convention, 1952 (No. 103)**. These standards progressively expanded the scope of and entitlements related to maternity protection at work in line with the evolving status and recognition of women’s rights in the world of work.

Other ILO instruments that relate to maternity protection and childcare include the **Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952, (No. 102)**, and the **Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)**. The latter provides guidance for the establishment and maintenance of social protection floors and their implementation within strategies for the extension of social security.

SDG Target 5.4: “Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and through the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.”

n.d.). Among the 67 countries surveyed in the ILO (2018a) report, Cambodia displayed the second-lowest rate of unpaid care work undertaken by men, accounting for only 8.7 per cent of total unpaid work performed.

► Unpaid care and domestic work is the primary barrier for women engaging in and staying in the workforce in Asia and the Pacific.

A global research project under the ILO’s Women at Work Centenary Initiative found that “motherhood penalties” related to unpaid care responsibilities posed a major constraint with regard to women’s employment rates,

participation in leadership and pay equity (ILO 2019a). The research indicates that between 2005 and 2015, the “motherhood employment penalty” (the difference in the proportion of adult women with children under six years in employment, compared to women without young children) increased by 38 per cent. As a result of the motherhood leadership penalty, only 25 per cent of managers with children under six years of age are women. Women’s share rises to 31 per cent for managers without young children. Fewer than one-third of managers were found to be women overall, although women managers are likely to be better educated than their male counterparts. With respect to pay equity, the global 20 per cent gender wage gap reflects a “motherhood wage penalty” that compounds across the working life of women with children, while fathers enjoy a wage premium.

Recognizing, reducing and redistributing the unpaid care imbalance between women and men that underpins such trends requires a range

of policy and practical measures. These include the following:

- ▶ public education and awareness campaigns to shift underlying social norms that place unpaid care responsibilities disproportionately on women and girls;
- ▶ encouraging and supporting men to play an equal role;
- ▶ provision of family-friendly working arrangements for all workers;
- ▶ availability of affordable and appropriate quality childcare and other care supports; and
- ▶ provision of maternity protection.¹⁹

The following sections examine the latter two pathways in this list.

1.3.3.1 Pathway 1: Appropriate and affordable quality childcare

Lack of appropriate and affordable quality childcare services restricts women's employment opportunities generally, and often constrains them into taking more flexible but lower-paid work in the informal economy, including within Asia's garment sector. For women workers in this position, childcare responsibilities lead to a significant loss of earnings in the short term, and contribute to low incomes for women across their life cycle – circumstances reflected in higher poverty rates and limited access to work-related pensions among older women (ILO and WIEGO 2019a).

In some garment-producing countries (for example Cambodia, China and Viet Nam) a spatial separation exists between the production zones where garment workers live and the rural areas where their families (including their children) live. In these cases, the unpaid work of childcare takes place away from the working mother. Research by the Clean Clothes Campaign indicates that while

workers in the production zones are therefore not necessarily directly burdened with unpaid care tasks, they are denied the right to stay with their families, while childcare adds to the workload of mainly older generations of women in rural areas (Luginbuhl 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has further focused the spotlight on the importance of providing childcare. As some factories reopen, day-care facilities have often remained closed as a means of limiting the spread of COVID-19. This has left working women in particular without options to support their return to work, despite national law in several countries of the region requiring the provision of nursery or childcare facilities. In Bangladesh, Cambodia and India, for example, the pandemic's impact on workers and their families has highlighted the failure of governments to enforce compliance with childcare requirements enshrined in law and to ensure affordable, professional and accessible care services for all workers (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020).

▶▶ Childcare responsibilities lead to a significant loss of earnings in the short term, and contribute to low incomes for women across their life cycle – circumstances reflected in higher poverty rates and limited access to work-related pensions among older women.

¹⁹ The full set of ILO policies and measures with respect to gender equality around unpaid care work are set out under the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work. The 5Rs are: **recognize**, **reduce** and **redistribute** unpaid care work; **reward** paid care work by promoting more and decent work for care workers; and guarantee care workers' **representation**, social dialogue and collective bargaining. The 5R-related policies and measures are guided by international labour standards (ILO 2018a).

Quality childcare provision a win-win for workers and employers

The benefits to both workers and employers of appropriate and affordable quality childcare services are well demonstrated in the findings of an IFC (2019) survey conducted on childcare status and issues in Myanmar. Although the survey covered the economy more broadly, its findings are applicable to the garment sector, which is Myanmar's major source of formal employment. Provision of childcare services was found to create a more motivated and committed workforce, reduce absenteeism, increase productivity and help attract and retain employees. The survey further showed that lack of childcare support was a major concern for workers:

- nine in ten employees in the broader economy said their childcare responsibilities impacted their work;
- 53 per cent had taken time off work for childcare reasons;
- 68 per cent of women had been unable to attend a training course or complete studies;
- 17 per cent of men had turned down an offer of a new job; and
- 10 per cent of women and 8 per cent of men had refused a promotion.

Both women and men reportedly delayed having children in order to remain in employment. In Myanmar, women feel continuing pressure to quit work when they have children. Similar IFC surveys undertaken in Cambodia and Viet Nam reinforce the Myanmar findings, with garments and footwear as one of the sectors covered in both these cases (IFC 2020a, 2020b).

Childcare support can take many forms. At the public policy level, these can include: publicly funding (fully or in part) childcare services; requiring private companies above a certain size to provide childcare facilities; ensuring decent work for paid carers; and encouraging men's involvement in childcare (IFC 2019). The gains for working parents and young children from quality childcare services are enhanced if these comprise part of a complementary set of social and labour protection policies, including maternity protection, health coverage and child

benefits (ILO 2018a). A study of the status of state-supported childcare in 46 countries in Asia and the Pacific indicated that 25 countries provided childcare services, and 17 of the countries surveyed provided parents with allowances for children under six years old (Blum, Koslowski, and Moss 2017; ESCAP 2019b).

At the factory level, childcare support can cover a variety of approaches. These range from onsite facilities to fee subsidies for community-based childcare, breastfeeding rooms and family friendly corporate policies. The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) provides an important basis for stakeholder dialogue and action in this regard.

The Cambodia experience, however, shows that the workplace-based childcare option is not a straightforward one. The Labour Law requires enterprises employing a minimum of 100 women or girls (over the legal age for employment) to set up a nursing room and a crèche, either within their premises or nearby. If the company does not offer a childcare option on site or nearby, female workers with children 18–36 months of age have the right to place their children in any available crèche with the charges paid by the employer (IFC 2020b). However, an IFC survey has revealed that only 33 per cent of Cambodian companies offer childcare onsite or nearby (2020b). Where such services are offered, they tend to be related to additional oversight and support provided

► It is vital that government social protection policies and measures take account of the millions of women in home-based and other forms of informal and vulnerable work across Asia's garment-producing countries.

by international buyers, trade partners, NGOs and the ILO/IFC Better Factories Cambodia programme. At the same time, Cambodian garment factories report low or no usage of available childcare facilities. Reasons for the low uptake include insufficient resourcing and low standards of facilities, materials and care. The unwillingness of workers to bring their children on long, unsafe and unhealthy commutes to work presents another factor (IFC 2020b).

Accessing affordable and quality childcare support can be even more of a challenge for the millions of women in Asia's garment sector affected by casualization of the workforce, short-term contracts, and informal and vulnerable forms of employment such as home-based work. They are often excluded from access to means of financing childcare through maternity and other social protection benefits that may exist under national laws or be negotiated under collective agreements. It is vital that government social protection policies and measures take account of the millions of women in home-based and other forms of informal and vulnerable work across Asia's garment-producing countries.


Multi-stakeholder action and women's voices are needed to boost childcare availability and access

Multi-stakeholder action is critical, if the childcare dimensions of women's disproportionate unpaid care burdens are to be effectively addressed. Key actors within garment supply chains, including governments and employers' and workers' organizations, need to act together to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work in line with Convention No. 156 and SDG target 5.4. Experience shows that the best solutions for meeting the childcare needs of workers involve all relevant stakeholders, particularly the women workers concerned, through an open social dialogue approach. As with other issues critical to gender equality in the garment sector, collective bargaining and agreements provide important vehicles for ensuring that the childcare needs of workers, particularly women workers, are appropriately identified and resourced.

Advice from the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the ILO, along with UN Women, has further emphasized the centrality of childcare

considerations to effective employer responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need, in particular, to ensure that childcare provision is feasible and based on workers' needs, with prioritization of workers in vulnerable situations and attention to issues of non-discrimination, accessibility, affordability, safety and quality. Another key consideration is guaranteeing quality jobs with decent working conditions for childcare workers (UNICEF, ILO and UN Women 2020).

Ensuring an outcome that both works for all concerned and is adequately resourced means that women's voices must be at the centre of social dialogue processes at all levels of negotiation regarding childcare provision. The wider benefits of creating skills development and employment opportunities in paid care work should also be a key consideration in such dialogue. At the same time, it is important to remain focused on the redistribution aspect of reducing women's disproportionate unpaid work burden. Among other things, this requires education and awareness-raising efforts by governments, employers, trade unions, NGOs and other actors to encourage and support men in taking up their share of unpaid care responsibilities within their families, communities and workplaces. Prioritizing the ratification of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981, No. 156, by garment-producing countries would add impetus to steps in these directions.

 **Women's voices must be at the centre of social dialogue processes.**

1.3.3.1 Pathway 2: Maternity protection – A cornerstone of equality for women

Lack of compliance with legislative commitments an issue across the sector

Lack of compliance by some employers with legislative commitments regarding the rights of pregnant women provides one stark illustration of gender-based discrimination within Asia's garment sector (ILO 2019h). In Myanmar, reported practices have included the non-hiring of pregnant women and forced pregnancy tests for women prior to and during employment. Women who return to work after pregnancy are often paid at the starting salary, losing any salary gains they had made prior to giving birth (ILO 2019h). Pregnancy tests have likewise been found to have been used in a small number of Viet Nam garment factories during recruitment, and workers have been required to sign non-pregnancy clauses as a condition for contract renewal (Better Work 2019a). While the levels of discrimination related to pregnancy in garment factories in Cambodia is found to be comparatively low – with 2.16 per cent of employers found to have terminated pregnant workers or forced them to resign in 2018 (Better Factories Cambodia 2018a) – trade unions report that actual levels could be higher as a result of the short-term contracts under which many garment workers are employed (Sineat and Handley, 2018). In Bangladesh, pregnancy is the leading reason for women leaving jobs in the ready-made garment sector, with pregnant women sometimes being pressured by managers and supervisors to quit because they were seen as inefficient (ILO and UN Women 2020).

Issues related to women's access to maternity benefit entitlements under existing legislation are also evident within the sector. A UNICEF (2017) report on Viet Nam indicates that maternity protection, while strong on paper, sometimes results in reduced income for women. This is because social insurance payments during maternity leave consider only basic salary, not overtime or productivity bonuses. Without overtime and bonuses, workers' incomes fall below living standards. As a result, requirements for reduced working hours for pregnant and nursing workers are sometimes disregarded.

In Myanmar, an ILO (2019h) garment sector survey of 16 factories found that nearly all survey respondents (99.7 per cent) said they knew about their legal right to maternity leave. Differences were revealed, however, in how maternity leave was defined by employers. Approximately 12 per cent of the surveyed workers further said they were not offered maternity leave in their workplace. The ILO/IFC Better Work programme in Indonesia likewise reported that many women in garment factories were denied maternity protection rights and remain vulnerable throughout their maternity period. In some cases, maternity protection rights were not recognized by employers or were difficult to claim (Better Work Indonesia 2017).

Such examples and practices highlight the importance of systematic and transparent monitoring of the implementation of maternity protection legal provisions by government labour inspectorates, employers' and workers' organizations, NGOs, international agencies and others.

Addressing maternity benefit and enforcement gaps – A priority for women workers

Maternity benefits provide a cornerstone of society-wide policies and measures to promote and protect the rights of pregnant women. Paternity and parental leave benefits are also being increasingly introduced as part of national maternity protection packages. Such benefit arrangements exist alongside workplace measures such as non-discriminatory recruitment and management practices and provision of health and breastfeeding facilities and services.

By contributing to and/or monitoring the strengthening and implementation of maternity-related benefits, governments and other garment sector stakeholders can in turn support the rights, protection and prospects of women across the region's garment sector. Such policies and measures protect women from having to work through the late stages of pregnancy and from having to return to work prematurely after the birth. They potentially enable a more even distribution of childcare responsibilities within the household, while supporting women's ongoing participation in the labour force. However,

maternity benefits in Asia and the Pacific mainly cover only women in formal employment due to the prevalence of coverage through contributory schemes or employer liability arrangements. Only nine countries in the region provide cash benefits to the majority of women. Thus, millions of women in informal garment sector employment currently lie outside the reach of such benefits (ESCAP and ILO 2020).

ILO research shows that employer liability schemes can work against the interests of women workers by placing the financial burden on employers and creating a possible source of discrimination against women (ILO 2014). The research observes that employers in this position “may be reluctant to hire, retain or promote pregnant workers or women with family responsibilities, or may find reasons to discharge pregnant employees to avoid paying the costs of wage replacement during maternity leave and other (potential or actual) costs linked to their replacement. In many cases, this simply means not hiring women of childbearing age” (ILO 2014, 4)

In this context, the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) emphasizes that employers should generally not be individually liable for the cost of maternity benefits payable to women employed by them, and that benefits should be generally provided through compulsory social insurance or public funds. The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), further calls for including maternity

protection as part of the national social protection systems.

In addition, the duration of maternity benefits in Asia often falls short of internationally established minimal standards. Convention No. 183 stipulates at least 14 weeks maternity leave at a payment of at least two-thirds of the regular salary. Almost half of all countries in the region do not meet the duration requirement, in particular those with employer liability arrangements (ESCAP and ILO 2020).

A key element in improving the position of women in the region’s garment sector is thus campaigning for improved maternity protection in line with international standards, linked to ratification of Convention No. 183, and strengthening national social protection policies, programmes and coverage, including for informal workers.

Table 2 presents the status of maternity protection in the four focus countries. Financing is provided in one case by the employer, in two cases by the national social security fund, and in one case jointly by the national social security fund and the employer. Moving towards collectively financed maternity protection across all garment-producing countries in the region is clearly a priority for “moving the needle” on gender equality within the sector. According to ILO calculations, such protection is not only affordable and feasible in all countries, but also contributes to wider social and economic development (ILO 2015c).



► Table 2. Family leave provisions in the focus countries

Country	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Main funding source
Cambodia	<p>Ninety calendar days, paid in two parts: By employer: 50% of previous 12 months' earnings, for employees with 12 months seniority (Better Factories Cambodia 2019). By National Social Security Fund: In addition to the above, 70% of daily wage over previous 12 months' is paid by the National Social Security Fund to eligible workers (see right-hand column) There is a wage ceiling of 1.2 million riels (around US\$300) for this payment. For workers earning more than US\$300, the maximum they can receive is 70% of US\$300 (Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training Prakas No. 449 of 2017).</p>	Not available	<p>National Social Security Fund and employer. To be eligible for payment by the National Social Security Fund, workers must (i) be employed by companies/enterprises registered for Health Insurance with the Fund; (ii) be registered for Health Insurance with the Fund; and (iii) have paid contributions for at least 9 consecutive months prior to the start of the maternity leave.</p>
Indonesia	<p>Three months at 100% of previous earnings (1.5 months before and after giving birth (Act No. 13/2003, arts 82, 84).</p>	<p>Two days at 100% pay. Male civil servants are additionally eligible for one month of paternity leave at their basic pay (Act No. 13/2003, art. 93(4) (e)).</p>	Employer.
Myanmar	<p>Up to 14 weeks at 70% of previous 12 months' earnings, plus 50–100% of a monthly salary as a maternity grant depending on number of children. (ILO 2017c). As part of COVID-19 response, the National Social Security Board additionally provides 8–26 weeks sick leave with 60% income replacement for pregnant women. (Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population Social Security Board Directive (9/2020).</p>	<p>Up to 15 days at 70% of previous 12 months' earnings, plus half of maternity grant for uninsured spouse; for employed fathers who are covered under the Social Security Law (ILO 2017c).</p>	<p>Social Security Fund, eligible after six months' contribution into the Fund and 12-month registration period.</p>
Viet Nam	<p>Twenty-six weeks (six months) at 100% of average salary for the six months preceding the leave for women paying social insurance (Labour Code 2019, article 139).</p>	<p>Between five and 14 days paid leave for males paying social insurance, depending on the type of birth, number of children born and whether a child is adopted (University of Sydney 2019b).</p>	Social Security Fund.

1.3.4 Women's voice, representation and leadership

► Box 9 Women's voice, representation and leadership: Relevant global commitments

ILO: A core priority across ILO policies and programmes is removing barriers to the achievement of gender equality in voice, representation and leadership in the world of work. This objective is reflected in such key documents as the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019) and its associated ILO Women at Work Initiative.

SDG Target 5.5: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Critical Area of Concern G in "Women in Power and Decision-making": This platform, which was adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, states, "Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved" (para. 181).

Pervasive disparities in garment sector leadership and management

Despite the global commitments outlined above, the realities of persistent gender gaps in women's voice, representation and leadership in all spheres of society remain stark. In Asia and the Pacific, the average representation of women in national parliaments was only 20 per cent in 2019, compared with the global average of 25 per cent. At the time of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the level for Asia was 13.5 per cent. In business, women's share of management roles in the region was 22.5 per cent in 2018, a slight increase from 17.7 per cent in 1991 (ILO 2019b). In Indonesia and Viet Nam, for example, only 15.0 per cent and 23.1 per cent of companies, respectively, have a female CEO. At governing board level, the figures are 8.1 per cent and 5.3 per cent, respectively (ILO 2019b). Progress in these and other spheres has at best been slow (ESCAP 2019a).

The gender gaps at all levels of leadership and management within the business and worker institutions and processes that make up Asia's garment sector reflect these broader trends (Prieto-Carrón 2008). Although comprehensive garment sector data for Asia are not yet available, multiple sources (including the ILO/IFC Better

Work programmes) indicate that management and supervisory roles in the sector are overwhelmingly held by men. The ILO/IFC Better Factories Cambodia programme, for example, states in its gender strategy that the senior management in most factories in the garment export sector is "most likely male and foreign" (Better Factories Cambodia 2018c, 11). It further observes that career advancement opportunities in the industry are especially rare for women due to reasons such as the widespread perception among both women and men that "women don't make as good supervisors/managers because of gender stereotypical characteristics as well as their responsibilities at home" (Better Factories Cambodia 2018c, 11).

In Myanmar, ILO (2020h) research indicates that the lack of clarity on what career pathways exist for women in the garment sector means that female employees tend to see their employment as only short-term, which provides a strong disincentive to look for opportunities for advancement.

There is ample evidence of the positive impacts at a more general (cross-sector) level of having more women in business leadership roles. In a recent ILO (2019e) enterprise survey, 68 per cent of enterprises based in Asia and the Pacific reported that gender diversity and equality

improved business outcomes, yet a widespread lack of promotion of women in leadership roles persists across the board.

A critical factor in this context is the influence of unconscious gender bias on behaviour and decision-making. With respect to women's access to leadership in business, for example, a survey by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities indicated that the five top barriers are all related to discrimination and unconscious gender bias (ILO 2017a; see box 10). Such bias is, in turn, rooted in deep-seated gender-based discriminatory social norms. Asia and the Pacific data drawn from the 2010–2014 World Values Survey showed that more than 50 per cent of respondents in most countries agreed on average that "men make better political leaders than women". A question regarding business leadership drew similar responses, overall (ESCAP 2019a).

These dynamics are further reflected within employers' organizations. The ILO reports that, despite the scarcity of data, it can "confidently be said that the majority of employers' organizations have a board of directors with fewer than 10 per cent women, and only 8 per cent have a gender-balanced board. Within these organizations, women face similar structural barriers to those confronting women who wish to progress in their career in the world of work" (ILO 2019a, 53). In recognition of such gaps, employers' bodies in various countries have begun to take steps to promote and improve gender diversity internally (ILO 2019a). These measures include flexible working arrangements, child-friendly policies, and mentoring and training for staff on gender diversity (Djaya, Brown, and Lupu 2019).

► Box 10 Barriers to women's leadership in the world of work

A 2013 survey conducted by the ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities across companies in developing regions ranked what respondents considered the 15 most significant barriers to women's leadership in business. While the consolidated rankings may obscure differences between regions, it was notable that all regions identified the same top five or six barriers relating to women's and men's social and reproductive roles, and the reflection of these in workplace structures and practices. Although focused on women's leadership in business more generally, the barriers identified apply across all areas and levels in the garment sector globally, including within trade unions. The 15 barriers in ranked order are as follows:

1. Women bearing more family responsibilities than men
2. Roles assigned by society to men and women
3. Masculine corporate culture
4. Women with insufficient general or line management experience
5. Few role models for women
6. Lack of encouragement for men to take leave for family responsibilities
7. Lack of company equality policy and programmes
8. Stereotypes against women
9. Lack of leadership training for women
10. Lack of flexible work solutions
11. No strategy for retention of skilled women
12. Inherent gender bias in recruitment and promotion
13. Management generally viewed as a man's job (ranked same as no. 12)
14. Gender equality policies in place but not implemented
15. Inadequate labour and non-discrimination laws

Source: ILO 2015a.

The gender-based leadership and decision-making gaps seen in employer bodies and garment sector companies are also systemically reflected within trade unions in the sector. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), women's trade union membership in general stands on average at 40 per cent, yet women occupy only 15 per cent of the top decision-making positions in their organizations (ITUC, n.d.), a dynamic also evident in the garment sector.

Stephanie Barrientos and Barbara Evers (2013, 48) observe that state regulation, workers' organizations and labour unions have traditionally been the main channels through which workers enforce their rights: "Yet, these are often characterized by paternalistic management and traditional labour organizations which have tended to ignore women's needs as workers and as social providers."

In her working paper "Patriarchal Unions = Weaker Unions?" *Industrial Relations in the Asian Garment Industry*, Alice Evans (2016) further argues that, while trade unions have been a major driver of improved working conditions in the garment industry and beyond, gender ideologies are among the various impediments they face: "Widespread expectations of acquiescent women and assertive men mean that unions are often patriarchal and authoritarian, inattentive to their female members' ideas and concerns, curbing their collective analysis (Evans 2016, 1)." Evans observes that tackling norm perceptions and building more inclusive unions may thus help strengthen the labour movement.

The ITUC, among other actors active in the garment sector in Asia, has committed itself to ensuring that at least 30 per cent of leadership roles are held by women across its membership. The following are among the reasons given for ITUC's women's leadership campaign (ITUC, n.d.):

- the difference women leaders will make in terms of leadership being more representative of the workforce;
- enhancing the ability of unions to represent women's interests and attract women members;
- strengthening the capacity of unions to advance members' interests; and
- investing in democracy and the strength of the movement.

The Vietnam General Confederation of Labour, Viet Nam's national trade union, is similarly committed to achieving a 30 per cent threshold of women in leadership (ITUC, n.d.).

As noted elsewhere, however, due to factors such as discriminatory gender-related social norms and the way these norms play out within particular institutional contexts, representation in itself does not necessarily translate into genuine influence or empowerment (ESCAP 2019a). Programmes in Cambodia's garment sector such as that described in box 11 aim to address such norms in practice, and to enable women leaders to engage equally and influentially in processes that affect their working life and beyond. The importance of engaging men in shifting social norms has been recognized through the establishment of a parallel training programme for men in the workplace.

► Box 11 Leadership programme strengthens women's voices in workplace committees

The ILO/IFC Better Factories Cambodia programme and UN Women partnered in response to an identified need to support and strengthen participation by women participants in joint worker/management committees¹ in garment export factories in Cambodia. They set up a transformative leadership programme for women workers that complements existing training for mainly women garment sector workers in areas including supervisory skills and sexual harassment. The training aims to accomplish the following: (1) strengthen the skills of women in joint worker/management committees to represent women workers in their factories and to analyse, communicate and act on the issues affecting those workers; and (2) contribute to individual and collective empowerment among women workers. As of this writing, 104 women from 26 factories have participated in the programme.²

A focus group of participants from two factories in Phnom Penh, part of a regional UN transformative women's leadership study, highlighted a number of key impacts and learnings.

Impacts included the following:

- greater confidence in speaking up and engaging with co-workers on issues of common concern;
- development of mutual support networks with workers in other factories facing similar issues; and
- new leadership skills in areas such as listening, power analysis, problem solving, constructive feedback and communication.

Key lessons identified by participants included the following:

- the importance of a safe and trusting learning environment;
- a learning approach based on direct experience and engagement with peers;
- developing an understanding of gender power dynamics in the workplace and at home;
- appreciating and valuing others as part of a collective approach to leadership; and
- attention to ongoing networking, joint activity and mutual support.

The programme also highlighted the need to engage men with respect to gender norms and show them how they can be allies in promoting gender equality while reflecting on their own gendered experiences. As a result, a gender equality training programme for men has been also been established under Better Factories Cambodia auspices within Cambodia's garment factories.

Source: ESCAP 2019a

¹ All participants are members of worker/employer Performance Improvement Consultative Committees established formally under Better Factories Cambodia's programme in Cambodia's garment export sector.

² The 104 female participants consisted of 48 managers, 23 supervisors, 16 workers and 17 worker representatives. A parallel gender training for men has covered 39 participants in 12 factories to date.

1.3.5 Social dialogue participation reflects wider gender disparities

Systemic gender gaps are also evident within social dialogue institutions and processes that bring governments, employers and workers together across the economy at national and sector levels, as well as within collective bargaining processes. The ILO's 2019 *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality* report suggests that, despite the available evidence that women benefit from their increased presence in collective bargaining processes, under-representation of women is a reality in national social dialogue institutions such as economic and social councils, tripartite commissions and labour advisory boards. Available data for 2018 show that female membership in national social dialogue institutions ranged from merely 20 to 35 per cent. Such gaps reflect the gender disparities at all levels within the core stakeholder groups and across sectors (ILO 2019a). Anecdotal feedback from ILO in-country offices in Asia indicates that the situation in the garment-producing countries of Asia reflects these global dynamics.

Given the predominance of women within the sector workforces of most countries of the region, this reality stands out in even higher profile. The barriers that constrain women's participation in leadership roles in this context include the time demanded by unpaid care responsibilities and male-dominated institutional cultures which discourage women from participating more

actively. Women are also often expected to take on administrative tasks, and are less likely to be identified as leaders or given the training and opportunities necessary to develop leadership skills (ILO 2019a).

► Systemic gender gaps are also evident within social dialogue institutions and processes that bring governments, employers and workers together across the economy at national and sector levels.

► Box 12 Addressing unpaid work burdens opens leadership opportunities

Addressing disproportionate unpaid care burden can help create space for women to engage in leadership roles. A focus group participant from an ILO/UN Women garment sector women's leadership training programme in Cambodia (see box 11 above) explained the following:

My husband never helped with any household chores. I did everything on my own, as well as working full time to earn money for my family. The training helped me to understand this as a gender issue – not as my born job in life. As a result, I gained confidence to discuss these issues with my husband and eventually persuaded him to do the laundry at home. He came to see that I have a paid job and we need to share the work at home. This helps me be active as a leader in my workplace

Source: ESCAP 2019a.

A number of strategies and tools exist for promoting increased women's leadership, voice and representation within all parts and levels of the industry. At the national level, evidence suggests that gender quota systems have increased women's representation in union decision-making processes and contributed to more equal representation of women and men among negotiators during collective bargaining. Having more women in decision-making structures has been shown to have a

positive impact on an organization's governance, identity and public image. Such developments influence women's perceptions about the values of organizations and incentivize them to join. Importantly, they can advance gender equality by prioritizing women's needs and aspirations in social dialogue and collective bargaining. Ensuring collective space for women to come together for mutual support and strategizing within union structures is a further essential strategy in this context (ILO 2019a).

► Box 13 Women in leadership

Two personal leadership profiles trace the respective pathways and achievements of these women leaders within the male-dominated employer and trade union garment sector environments in Indonesia and Myanmar.

Profile 1. Elly Rosita Silaban, trade union leader, Indonesia: "I want to see women play a more important role within trade unions"

Elly Rosita Silaban, from Tapanuli Utara in North Sumatra Province, is Indonesia's first female trade union leader. She explains that the best thing about her job is the opportunity to meet many important people and to influence them by speaking rationally.

"There's a proverb that says that the people who adapt are the ones who survive. I try to adapt and put myself in other people's shoes to understand their actions. This job pushes me to keep learning." When she meets workers as part of her role, she says, her questions are always "How much is your salary?" "How many pieces of clothing do you make a day?" and "Have you ever worn the shirts you make?"

"Most workers realize that what they have isn't equal to the profit they generate for the company," she continues. "But they feel hopeless, as they think there is nothing they can do to improve their circumstances."

Nevertheless, during her time as a trade union leader, Elly has witnessed positive changes in Indonesia's garment industry. These include improved dialogue between the Government, trade associations and international organizations. The relocation of factories across Indonesia is also seen as a positive change. "This generates benefits for other regions," she says, "so the industry doesn't just centre around Jakarta, and local economies grow. Working conditions are also getting better in some factories and – although others might still lag behind – we can see progress."

At the same time, Elly reports, challenges remain. One of these is the need to closely monitor investment policies and mechanisms. "There are many cases of investors or factory managers coming to Indonesia on tourist visas. Accountability and responsibility need to be enforced among these investors to prevent them running away if an incident or fatality happens. The Government has a very important role to play in this matter."

Another challenge is the impact of technological change, which is already affecting workers. "In the future, some labour will be replaced by robots," says Elly, "so workers need to prepare themselves to adapt to these changes. All parties need to work together to ensure that we are prepared."

Looking ahead, Elly hopes it will be possible to move on from basic issues such as wages to more sophisticated topics:

Wages should no longer be such an issue for our workers. I want to see stronger trade unions, more workers joining the unions, and less conflict. I also want to see women play a more important role within trade unions. Female activists need to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to participate in national and

international debates. I am happy to have finally smashed the glass ceiling as the first female president in the confederation, but during my campaign for the role, my gender became an issue. Often female members doubted me and supported male candidates instead. Fortunately, however, most people chose wisely based on my ability, not my gender.

Source: Better Work 2020a.

Profile 2. Rosaline (Daw Khine Khene Nwe), factory owner and managing director from Myanmar: “I learned to understand the difficulties of the workers.”

Rosaline is a co-founder and managing director at the Best Industrial Co., Ltd garment factory, established in 1994 as a joint venture company between China and the Republic of Korea, with the latter holding 66 per cent of the total shares. The company employs between 400 and 449 workers. Rosaline has subsequently served as a Joint Secretary-General of the Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI), and a member of its Central Executive Committee. She was the first woman elected to the Secretariat, and currently heads the UMFCCI’s Corporate Social Responsibility Committee. Among other national roles, Rosaline has further been re-elected for three terms as a representative of the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association, of which she is Secretary-General. Internationally, she has served as the Employer’s Delegate to the International Labour Conference and is a Trustee on the Board of the ASEAN Corporate Social Responsibility Network.

Rosaline’s trajectory to her role within Myanmar’s garment sector inadvertently began in 1986 when she took a job working in the offices of Daewoo Industrial Co., after having completed a master’s degree in Zoology at Yangon University. Daewoo was a diversified Korean company that had recently started investing in Myanmar’s garment sector. After returning to academic life in Bangkok and the United States, Rosaline came back to Myanmar for health reasons and returned to Daewoo. “When I worked in the office, I had to work with every department and so I learned all the processes from a variety of perspectives. And when I started working in the factory, I learned to understand the difficulties of the workers from the perspectives of both the production and office sectors.”

Using her savings to buy 20 sewing machines, she recruited her first staff and ventured into the business world. She came up with an innovative idea to buy batches of discarded clothing from the large garment factories and repair them so they could be upcycled. She recognized that this form of recycling was important not only to reduce waste, but also for her company’s development. Being one of a few women factory owners and managers in what is now a rapidly growing industry in Myanmar has not been easy. Key to her relations with her senior male colleagues is “being an open-minded person and speaking my mind openly”. Being able to communicate directly with colleagues, workers, suppliers and customers has proven to be an essential skill.

Source: ILO 2019c.

► **Box 14 Environment and gender equality: Examples of global commitments**

Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and Gender Action Plan: Adopted at the UN Climate Conference, COP 25, Madrid, December 2019.

Solidarity and Just Transition Declaration: Adopted at the 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Katowice, Poland, December 2018.

International Labour Conference resolution and conclusions promoting decent work, sustainable development and green jobs in response to climate change, adopted at 102nd Session, 2013.

ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition: Adopted at 102nd Session of the International Labour Conference, 2013.

Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action: Adopted in 2018 by fashion stakeholders under the auspices of UN Climate Change, with the aim of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion: Supports coordination between UN bodies working in fashion and promotes projects and policies to ensure fashion value chains contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Climate Action for Jobs Initiative: Provides a roadmap to boost climate action, ensuring that people's jobs and well-being are at the centre of the transition to a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient economy.

1.3.6 Environment and gender equality: Cornerstones of future sustainability

The sector has an environmental problem

Increasingly evident links between the growing climate crisis and the global garment industry provide an important lens on interdependent issues related to gender equality, labour rights and environmental sustainability. These links can be considered from two perspectives:

1. the contribution of the industry itself to accelerating climate change and environmental degradation; and
2. the increasing actual and potential impacts of climate change and a degraded environment on the industry and its predominantly female workforce.

The global textile and garment industry is itself a major contributor to those very climate change impacts from which it is also increasingly at risk. It is estimated that at least 5 per cent of total global emissions come from the fashion industry (Bauck 2017). Across the full life cycle of apparel production globally, the industry leaves an

annual carbon footprint that is close to the entire combined carbon footprint of all 28 members of the European Union (EU), including the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Global Carbon Project 2018). These figures may be explained in part by the fact that China and India, where coal and natural gas are key energy sources, produce more than 60 per cent of textiles used in the garment industry and are themselves responsible for a large proportion of the world's garment manufacturing.

Between 2005 and 2016, the climate impact of various production stages in the garment sector increased by 35 per cent. This is projected to increase even more, unless drastic changes in the industry lead to greater environmental sustainability (Quantis 2018). One further factor contributing to the garment sector's climate change impact is the production of steam from factory boilers. In Cambodia, the use of wood as fuel for generating steam for the ironing of garments has been identified as a major driver of forest loss in parts of Cambodia. The equivalent of

5,000 soccer fields of forest is burned every year for this purpose (Geres 2019).

In addition, 20 per cent of industrial water pollution globally is reportedly attributable to the dyeing and treatment processes within the textiles stage of the garment supply chain (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Many women and their families live close to the textile factories where they are employed, and they are affected by chemicals and dyes that flow into waterways and ecosystems in their communities, within which women and girls collect water and wash clothes. Moreover, the garment and textiles sector as a whole is – after oil and paper – the third-largest user of water globally, accounting for 2 per cent of all freshwater extraction. On current trends, this amount is set to double by 2030 (Common Objective, n.d.).

Gender equality, labour rights and environmental sustainability issues within the garment sector are further linked through various initiatives globally to make ready-made garments more sustainable by addressing the increasingly prevalent fast fashion/throw-away apparel culture. A recent McKinsey & Company study found that, of surveyed European consumers, 67 per cent consider the use of sustainable materials to be an important purchasing factor, and 63 per cent consider a brand's promotion of sustainability in the same way. Further, 38 per cent prioritized helping low-paid workers in Asian factories, as well as reducing negative environmental impacts (Greer et al. 2009). The latter have been intensified by the fast fashion culture, combined with the increasing use of more synthetic materials and fewer natural fibres. Of the total fibre input used for clothing manufacturing, 87 per cent ends up being dumped in landfills or incinerated (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017).

Climate change affecting garment workers

Due to their overall predominance and positioning within the industry workforce, women are at the centre of climate change impacts in the garment sector across Asia. In Bangladesh, at least, there is also growing evidence that factors such as the loss of agricultural production and the impact of extreme weather events linked to climate change are becoming a driver of female migration from

rural areas to garment production centres (Goering 2014; Plowman 2016).

Already, heat stress in the workplace and associated health impacts are proving to be among the most tangible effects of climate change in garment manufacturing. Although recent years have seen some improvements as a result of international and local decent work initiatives, factories across the region typically lack adequate ventilation and cooling systems. In Cambodia, heat stress has been identified as a contributing factor in periodic mass faintings among women in garment factories (McVeigh 2017). At a broader level, an ILO study of climate change and heat stress in the workplace indicates that overall labour productivity in South-East Asia is already severely affected by heat stress, with rising temperatures causing the loss, in 2015, of 3.1 per cent of working hours in the region (equivalent to 6.9 million full-time jobs) and projected to lead to the loss of 3.7 per cent of working hours in 2030 (equivalent to 13 million full-time jobs). Cambodia and Viet Nam are among countries suffering the greatest loss of working hours to date. Table 3 looks at working hours lost specifically within industry for the four South-East Asia focus countries of this paper. The situation in the region's garment factories is likely to closely reflect these trends.

► Due to their overall predominance and positioning within the industry workforce, women are at the centre of climate change impacts in the garment sector across Asia.

► **Table 3. Working hours lost due to heat stress in industry in four selected South-East Asian countries, 1995 and 2030 (projections) (%)**

Country	Lost working hours, 1995 (%)	Projected lost working hours, 2030 (%)
Cambodia	4.0	7.8
Indonesia	1.0	2.8
Myanmar	2.1	4.1
Viet Nam	2.4	5.0

Source: ILO 2019i.

Projected increases in extreme weather events will also have potentially significant impacts for factories located near waterways and susceptible to floods and rising sea levels (ADB 2017). Impacts could include the following:

- loss of production due to flooding;
- missed deadlines and orders, affecting trade and commerce;
- water supply and treatment disruptions;
- power outages; and
- disruption of transportation due to infrastructure damage (McKinsey & Company and BOF 2020).

The economic costs that may result from such environmental changes will likely be passed on to the women workers who perform most roles in the lowest tiers of the supply chain, and who are most vulnerable to losing wages or jobs in the midst of workplace disruption. Such costs are compounded by the lack of social protection and financial inclusion.

Taking advantage of weak regulation and enforcement

A significant factor in the gender equality, labour and environmental sustainability nexus has been the exploitation of regulatory uncertainty and gaps. This has proven a major driver for some sourcing companies in deciding where to locate elements of the supply chain that have high levels of environmental impact (Greer et al. 2009; Khan et al. 2009; Anguelov 2016). A number of researchers have pointed to multinational corporations strategically locating operations in countries such as Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia and Viet Nam, where environmental regulatory systems are still being developed (ILO 2019f). Countries seeking to attract foreign direct investment have also reduced their environmental conditions and/or set up special economic zones where environmental regulation is weaker (Anguelov 2016).



Part 2: Towards an equitable future – Pathways for change

▶ 2.1. Multiple actors and initiatives working for change across sector

The growth of the garment export sector in Asia has been accompanied by an increasingly diverse array of national and multi-country initiatives to address the deep-rooted manifestations of gender inequality and lack of accountability around which the industry has been structured. Such initiatives have included the following:

- ▶ formal social dialogue processes;
 - ▶ strikes and other direct actions by workers;
 - ▶ corporate social responsibility initiatives;
 - ▶ strategic research and policy engagement;
 - ▶ Better Work and other programmes at national policy and factory levels;
 - ▶ improving legislative and regulatory frameworks;
 - ▶ regional and global campaigns by consumer and civil society organizations (CSOs);
 - ▶ international union solidarity campaigns;
 - ▶ programmes to address sexual harassment; and
 - ▶ women's leadership and management training programmes.
- ▶ Influential actors in this context include:
- ▶ governments of garment-producing countries;

- ▶ employers' bodies, trade unions, informal workers' associations;
- ▶ women's organizations/networks (domestic and international);
- ▶ brands/buyers;
- ▶ international NGOs, and international NGO and trade union campaigns;
- ▶ local CSOs active at the factory and community levels; and
- ▶ sector improvement initiatives through the ILO/IFC Better Work programme and myriad other international actors.

As the previous analysis indicates, the process of change in global garment supply chains is complex, multi-layered and underpinned by power dynamics at various levels. Woven into all the change processes within the sector is the necessity of identifying and shifting discriminatory social norms and practices, including dimensions related to unconscious gender bias (ILO 2017a).

The complexities are highlighted by Alice Evans in her 2019 research on drivers of change in labour conditions within global supply chains. The study highlights three broad and complex sets of strategies that can be observed in practice across supply chains:

1. private regulation (for example, through auditing factory working conditions);
2. the role of organized labour, sometimes supported by outside development assistance; and
3. incentives for pro-labour reform through means such as labour conditionalities in preferential trade agreements (PTAs).

Noting that strong, autonomous labour movements are shown to be critical for workers' rights, pay and conditions, the study observes that the evidence for the success of each set of strategies is "patchy at best". While some evidence of impact can be observed in the third strategy – particularly with respect to potentially negative consequences for exports in the absence of reform – the study notes that such agreements are not always enforced, and change may be only superficial and temporary (Evans 2019).

Woven into all the change processes within the sector is the necessity of identifying and shifting discriminatory social norms and practices, including dimensions related to unconscious gender bias.



► 2.2 Key messages to support joint action for change

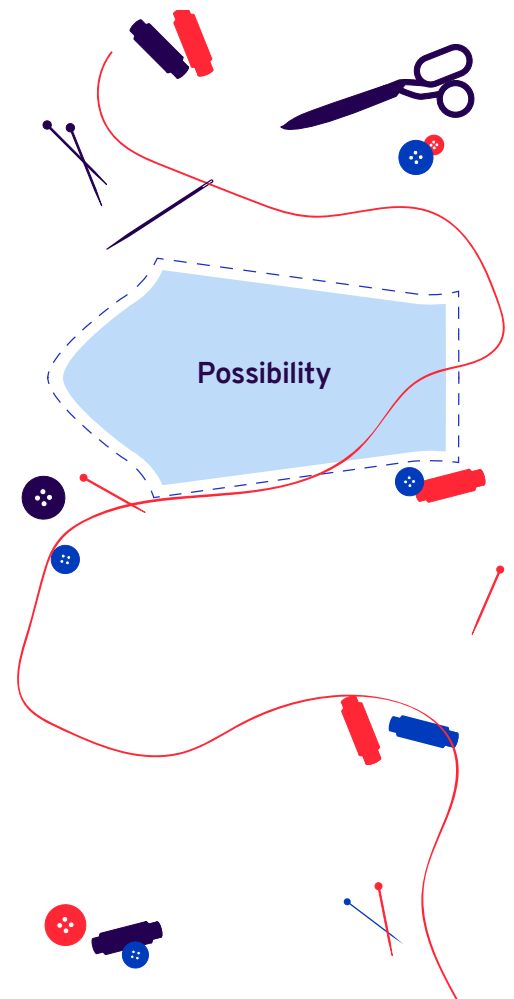


The following key messages draw on the preceding analysis, as well as on interviews with selected garment sector stakeholders within the four focus countries. These messages highlight key priorities and imperatives for change in promoting gender equality and environmental sustainability in the sector. Seven alliterative key themes are highlighted: Possibility, power, participation, partnership, planet, policy and practice.

1. Possibility for change. As stated in the COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry²⁰, the crisis triggered by the pandemic presents a rare opportunity to promote a transformative agenda that can realize a better future of work in the global garment sector – one that supports sustainable economic, social and environmental development, with gender equality and environmental sustainability as both key drivers for change and outcomes (ILO 2020d).

The sector response to the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013 has already generated initial momentum in this direction. As the ILO *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality* report (2019a) observes, “transformation will not happen organically or by tentative and disjointed steps.” The following key messages represent initial core elements of a strategic multi-stakeholder pathway to a transformed sector. Such vision and commitments underpin the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work adopted in 2019 by Member States and national employers’ and workers’ organizations. This declared an imperative “to act with urgency to seize the opportunities and address the challenges to shape a fair, inclusive and secure future of work with full, productive and freely chosen employment and decent work for all” (ILO 2019d, 3).

²⁰ The Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry was announced in April 2020 and was developed by the International Organisation of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the IndustriALL Global Union, and coordinated by the ILO.



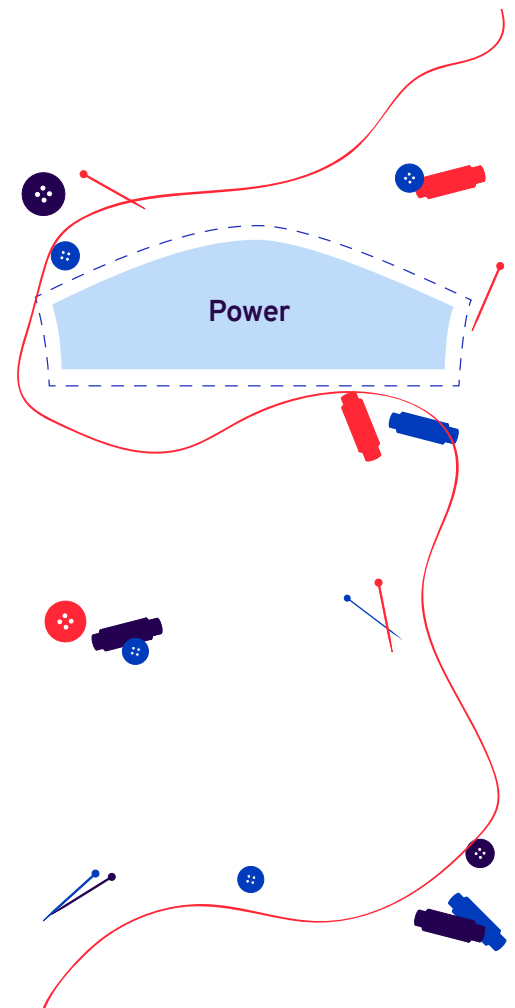
2. Power. Much commentary on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the way forward has highlighted the ways in which the current business model squeezes factories on price, where the overall balance of power ultimately rests in the hands of the international brands and associated buyers.²¹ Meanwhile the suppliers and predominantly female workforce, their families and their communities carry the major burden and the risks. The pandemic has turned up the spotlight on power differentials within the sector between brands and suppliers, workers and employers, and women and men. As observed earlier, the power and role of national governments within garment-producing countries has also been given heightened profile in the current context – particularly their capacity and willingness to enforce international labour and environmental standards to which they have committed, as well as related national legislation and regulations.

Rebalancing power dynamics and developing more equitable relationships based on common interests are increasingly perceived as core elements of ensuring a resilient, equitable and productive sector that benefits all actors within it. A key element in this is the strengthening of the collective power of women workers (“power with”), as opposed to the “power over” dynamics demonstrated by many international brands and investors under the current sector paradigm. An essential driver for such a shift is increasing the voice, representation and leadership of women within governmental systems, companies, employer bodies, trade unions and social dialogue processes.

As noted earlier, however, the fact that a range of international studies have highlighted an increased presence of women does not in itself necessarily translate into genuine influence or empowerment, given the way factors such as discriminatory social norms can play out within particular institutional contexts, including national parliaments (ESCAP 2019a). Specific, systematic and sustained attention is needed to the substantive exercise of power in all spheres – governmental, private sector and civil society. In the words of the ILO *A Quantum Leap for Gender Equality* report:

"For this to happen, bold commitments must translate into concrete transformative laws, policies and practices that remove stereotypes, value women’s and men’s work equally and open the door to women to sit at the table with equal power" (ILO2019a, 107). Ensuring transparency, openness and mutual accountability within such processes is vital to moving beyond mere statements to sustained and real shifts in power relations that see increased opportunities for substantive engagement by women in all aspects of the sector.

²¹ See, for example, Brooke Roberts-Islam, “Why Does the Fashion Industry Care Less about Garment Workers in Other Countries?”, in *Forbes*, 30 July 2020.



► **Box 15 Global social media campaign contributed to unlocking billions of dollars owed to garment workers**

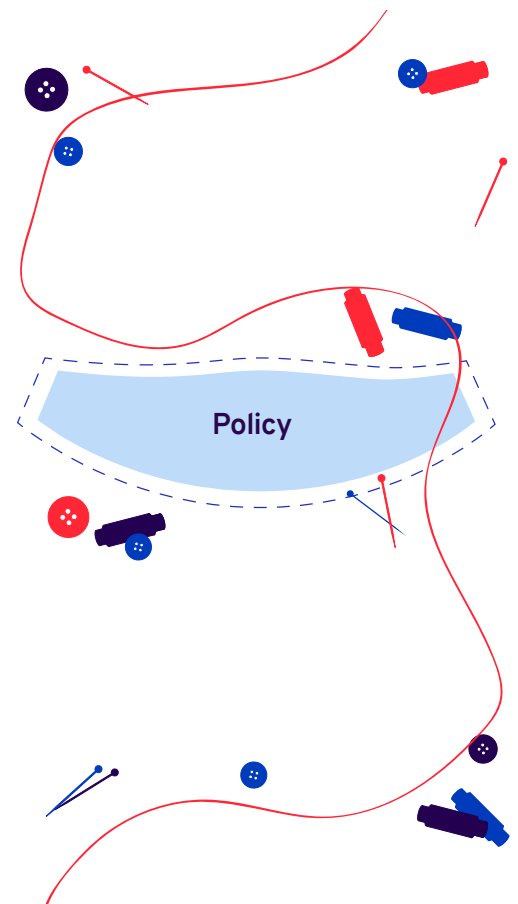
As job losses surged in garment-producing countries worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with massive impacts on the sector's largely female workforce, the non-profit advocacy organization Remake relaunched a global social media hashtag: #PayUp, which first emerged after the Rana Plaza collapse. Aimed at challenging global brands to pay workers what they were owed as a result of COVID-related job and income losses, the campaign had by 2 September 2020 seen some 20 brands committing to pay in full for orders completed and already in production. An estimated US\$1 billion had been recommitted in Bangladesh alone, with an estimated US\$22 billion recommitted globally. This accounted for about one-half of the US\$40 billion worth of wages owed to garment workers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be removed from the #PayUp petition, brands had to promise to pay suppliers for all orders that were cancelled or paused as a result of the pandemic. Brands also had to agree to pay for these cancelled and in-production orders in full (without asking suppliers for discounts) and in a timely manner (without extending payment terms unless financing options could be provided).

Source: Change.org 2020.

3. Policy. An essential cornerstone for transformative change in the garment sector is ensuring that effective, relevant and evidence-based public policy frameworks are in place at global, regional and national levels. These need to be underpinned by government commitments to the SDGs, international human rights frameworks, international labour standards and international environmental commitments. Absent such policies backed by adequate resourcing and implementation measures, pre-existing inequalities and environmental issues may well be intensified. This would undermine prospects for women's empowerment and improved sustainability within the sector. Private policy at international and national company levels can also play a vital role. Often linked to public policy frameworks, there are many examples across the region's garment sector of company policies and related initiatives in areas ranging from addressing discrimination in the workplace to promoting workplace cooperation through bipartite committees.

The key substantive policy areas that underpin this paper, along with the need for enhanced resourcing, demand greater attention. However, policy development and innovation around an equitable and sustainable future for the region's garment sector do not stand separate from the wider policy environment, including trade and social protection – the latter being a priority focus of the ILO's COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry. Preferential trade agreements (PTAs) can exert leverage in cases where labour rights obligations



have been included.²² Examples in the region include the EU's "Everything but Arms" agreements and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which includes Viet Nam. Sometimes such agreements can spur improvements in labour conditions. Governments do not always enforce PTA commitments, however, and trade partners do not necessarily sanction their non-compliance. This can merely create the appearance of change without concomitant substantive improvements in practice, which suggests that external pressures alone are insufficient (Evans 2019).

A lack of consistent, credible, comparable and up-to-date sector data to inform policymaking and planning thus presents a major impediment, including with respect to the key thematic areas that comprise the focus of this paper. Only limited, often fragmented and sometimes inconsistent information is currently available in each area. In the case of unpaid work, for example, only Cambodia has seen a time-use study (in 2003–2004, as a module within the National Socio-Economic Survey conducted by the National Statistical Office). Pay equity data are often similarly inconsistent and frequently dated.

Six International Labour Conventions provide essential foundations for legislation and policies promoting gender equality in the world of work:

- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100);
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111);
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156);
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183);
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190); and
- Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177).

²² See UNCTAD, "The New Way of Addressing Gender Equality Issues in Trade Agreements: Is It a True Revolution?", UNCTAD Policy Brief No. 53 (2017) for further background on trade agreements and labour rights obligations, as well as on mainstreaming gender equality into such agreements.

Table 4 below shows the current ratification status of these Conventions for each of this study's focus countries. A number of other Conventions are also directly relevant, including the following:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87);
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, No. 1949 (No. 98);
- Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154);
- Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention, 1928 (No. 26); and
- Minimum Wage-Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)

► **Table 4. Ratification status of International Labour Conventions essential for gender equality by the four focus countries**

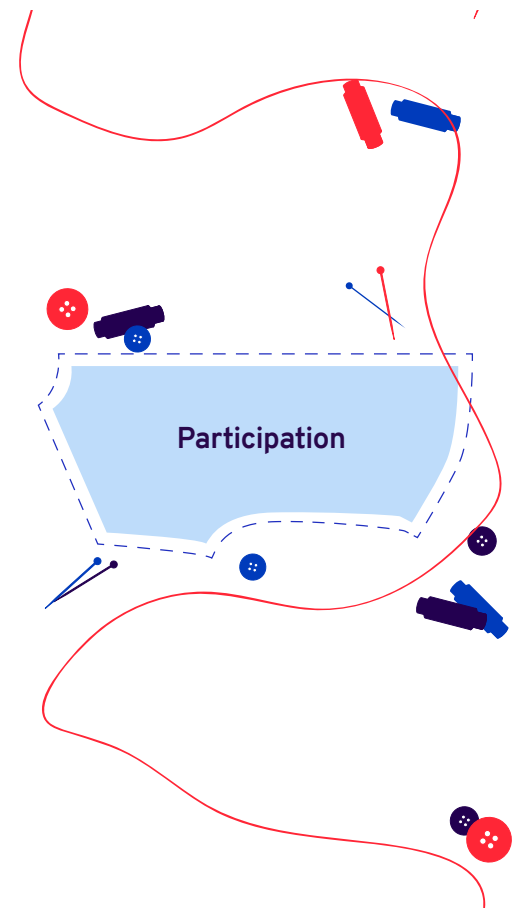
Convention	Cambodia	Indonesia	Myanmar	Viet Nam
Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)	√	√	x	√
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)	√	√	x	√
Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)	x	x	x	x
Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)	x	x	x	x
Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)	x	x	x	x
Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177)	x	x	x	x

√ = Ratified; X = Not ratified. 1 Conventions Nos 100 and 111 are included among the eight fundamental Conventions of the ILO.

4. Participation. Women’s voice, representation and leadership must lie at the heart of dialogue, policy development and decision-making in future strategies and plans. This is critical to transforming the position of the 35 million women workers across the garment sector in Asia within the “new normal” that emerges from the pandemic.

Women’s role in the forefront of the COVID-19 response as caregivers and community mobilizers across the region reinforces this imperative. Multiple vehicles exist for women’s participation, including through employer bodies, trade unions, enterprise committees, women’s work and union-based networks, grassroots organizations and the diverse women’s civil society networks and organizations active in the sector nationally and internationally. Not only is it urgent to give full opportunity to existing women’s voices, representation and leadership in all aspects of the sector, it is vital to prioritize policies and measures that accelerate the movement of women into such roles at all levels of the industry.

Also critical to ensuring that all voices and interests are part of shaping the future is giving attention to the intersection of gender with other sources of discrimination, such as race, disability, ethnicity, indigenous status, migration status, age, family status, HIV status and sexual orientation. Ensuring intersectionality in policy and practice is critical to linking issues and constituencies in ways that recognize multiple interests, perspectives and contributions.



► **Box 16 Indonesia inclusion programme “moves the needle”**

In Indonesia, each enterprise employing more than 100 workers is required by law to have persons with disabilities comprise at least 1 per cent of its workforce. Given the predominance of women in the sector, gender and disability intersect to a large degree. There is a high level of non-compliance by employers with this legal provision, and the ILO/IFC Better Work programme has found the causes of this non-compliance are complex and diverse. Key challenges cited by employers include a perception that finding candidates with disabilities requires significant effort, and that resources to actively pursue, train and retain workers with disabilities are limited.

Better Work in Indonesia reports that such challenges cannot be separated from the broader barriers facing workers with disabilities. These include issues of access related to transportation to and from factories, and guaranteeing worker safety in emergency responses, among other situations.

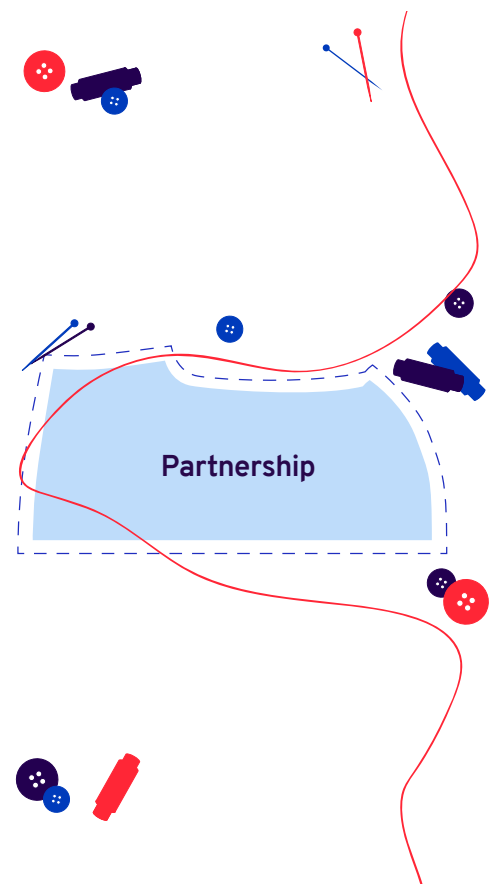
Better Work in Indonesia has addressed such issues using its regular garment factory assessments to ask questions about barriers and problems, backed up by advice on solutions as well as the provision of disability inclusion training. Better Work staff advise that the key is changing mindsets from a medical orientation to a rights and equal opportunities focus. To date, Better Work initiatives have seen a significant increase in the numbers of persons with disability employed by factories they cover, although numbers still fall well short of the 1 per cent target.

Source: Better Work 2017 and interview with Better Work Indonesia staff, 19 August 2020.

5. Partnership. Effective partnerships and collective action between key stakeholders at all sector levels will be essential to drive the change and innovation the sector needs to come out of the COVID-19 crisis on a more resilient, equitable and productive basis. Where relevant, such partnerships should embrace all parties within the global and regional supply chains – from governments, employers and workers (formal and informal), to brands, buyers, investors, international organizations, consumer bodies, international campaigns, women’s organizations and other CSOs and networks. Crucial to this collective action is the engagement of international garment brands in negotiating new business models for the sector that are both equitable and sustainable, as it is these brands that have benefited most from the current pricing and contracting model, and have – in effect – often exported the social and environmental costs to countries that can least afford them.

Central to effective partnerships are shared interests and purpose, inclusion, openness and transparency, mutual respect, power sharing and an orientation to win-win outcomes. However, developing collaboration between diverse stakeholders in a context of significant power differentials is a complex process. It requires a sustained investment of time and other resources, as well as the development of the requisite institutional capacities and skills. Success will entail establishing mechanisms and providing capacity support to address the power imbalances between women’s voices on the factory floor on the one hand, and the international brands on the other.

Achieving improved sectoral resilience, equity and productivity is not possible without gender-inclusive social dialogue and tripartism. Both approaches are embedded within the ILO structure. As the recent adoption of Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the workplace showed, tripartism provides a vital vehicle for enabling governments, employers’ organizations and workers’ organizations to expand and upscale partnerships to achieve gender equality in the world of work (ILO 2019a).



► Box 17 NGOs: A key player in international efforts to improve conditions in garment sector

Stephanie Barrientos and Barbara Evers (2013) observe that global production networks (GPNs) transcend national boundaries and often operate beyond the reach of government labour laws and national and local labour unions:

Hence the strategies of overseas buyers are often a key driver of employment conditions. In this context, gender equality-focused NGOs have a critical role in supporting women workers, both as commercial and as social actors. Civil society and international trade union campaigns have waged global campaigns to enforce labour standards and codes of labour practice down the value chain, using leverage at the consumer/marketing end of the GPN. This link between commercial sourcing and labour standards transcends the formal divide between the commercial and the social in GPNs.

Source: Barrientos and Evers 2013, 48.

The ILO and its constituents have an obligation, and are uniquely placed, to ensure that no one is left behind in the future of work. As noted in the aforementioned COVID-19 Call to Action, during previous crises – for example, the Great Recession of 2008–09 – countries that had strong social dialogue institutions in place were more likely to formulate rapid and effective responses and accelerate recovery. The imperative has never been stronger to have such institutions and processes in place and functioning effectively, with women's voices at their core. One form of social dialogue of critical importance to the future of the sector as a whole, as well as to the majority of workers who are women, entails collective bargaining and agreements at national, sectoral and enterprise levels. Examples across the region and beyond show that these can include the key elements of a new gender-equitable future for the sector, including the following:

- measures for pay equity;
- addressing discrimination, harassment and violence;
- addressing issues related to unpaid care, family responsibilities and maternity protection; and
- removing barriers to women's participation in leadership and decision-making (ILO 2019a).

► Box 18 Social dialogue: Putting shared priorities and joint solutions to the fore

Some countries in Asia, as part of their COVID-19 responses, have promoted social dialogue involving key national garment sector stakeholders. These include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020).

The Myanmar and Indonesia experiences are briefly examined below. The global garment sector COVID-19 Call to Action has prioritized these two countries (among others) for national joint stakeholder action.

Myanmar social dialogue response: Early action builds momentum. A recognition of shared interests in the face of the COVID-19 crisis quickly brought together a group of Myanmar employer, trade union and global brand representatives to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the garment sector. Based on a joint public commitment to freedom of association and social dialogue built on mutual respect and trust, they agreed to cooperate to achieve the following:

1. secure the workplace health and safety of workers in the sector;
2. mitigate the impact of the crisis on factories and workers;
3. promote respect for the core ILO labour standards, including the principle of freedom of association;
4. support rapid and innovative fund mobilization so that suppliers can continue to provide jobs and income to workers; and
5. support the development of social protection floors and extension of social protection for workers and employers.

A number of immediate next steps were jointly agreed alongside specific commitments by trade unions, employers and global brands (ACT 2020).

This initiative provided early momentum for the wider sector working group established in Myanmar on 18 August 2020 as one measure to implement the global garment sector Call to Action. This brought together representatives of brands, two national trade union bodies, the Myanmar Garment Manufacturing Association and the EU to discuss joint priorities for the way forward.

Indonesia social dialogue response: “Reinforcing our togetherness”. The ILO/IFC Better Work programme has played an active role in encouraging and supporting social dialogue on wages and other issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Better Work produced guidelines for social dialogue, and convened a seminar for international brands. One of the main challenges was bridging the divergent interests of sector stakeholders. Trade unions, for example, had concerns about membership and rights issues. Brands, on the other hand, were concerned about sales. Suppliers were hit by reductions in orders. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Government was concerned about broader health and economic impacts. To help bring the divergent perspectives together, Better Work approached major stakeholders one by one. In recognition of the fact that the Indonesian industry is 70–80 per cent Korean-owned, they included the Korean Garment Association. Unions and buyers in one case, and brands and suppliers in another, were brought together in separate online meetings (Interview with Better Work Indonesia staff, 19 August 2020).

These developments contributed to the issuing on 6 August 2020 of a national joint commitment by national employer and trade union bodies on addressing COVID-19 impacts and promoting a sustainable garment sector. The joint statement is premised on social dialogue, upholding international labour standards and promoting compliance with OSH and COVID-19 related guidelines. The shared commitment to a sustainable, win-win recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was reinforced by Sinta Widjaja Kamdani, Deputy of the Indonesian Employers’ Association (Apindo), who stated that “we want to show our international buyers that we are dealing with this issue together and we are committed to follow the new protocols for the benefits of both workers and employers.” Elly R. Silaban President of Federation of Garment, Handicraft, Textile and Industrial Centers of the Indonesian Labour Union Confederation (FSB-Garteks KSBSI), reinforced the same message, stating that “this is our togetherness and our joint response to overcome the challenges that we are jointly facing” (Better Work 2020b).

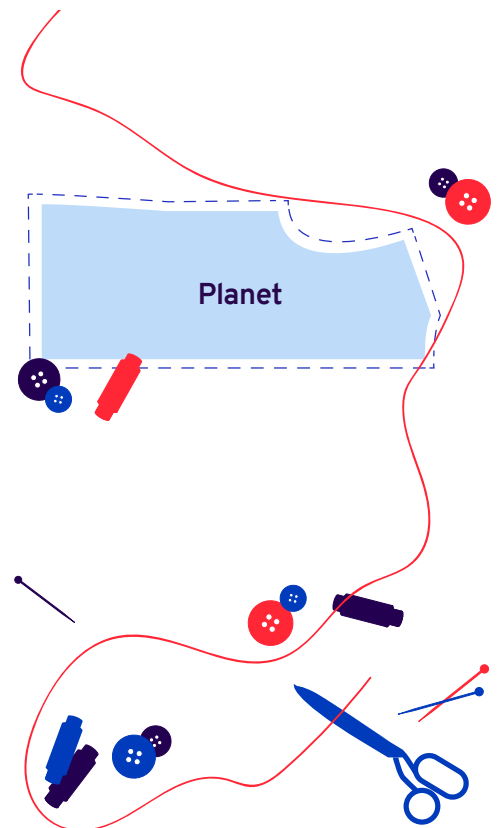
6. Planet The links between gender equality, labour rights, climate change and environmental sustainability are an everyday reality for many women workers who already bear the brunt of climate change impacts, such as increased workplace temperatures and disruptions due to extreme weather events. They also directly experience the environmentally harmful aspects of garment production, including the use of toxic chemicals, in their workplaces and communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to leverage such links and synergies to accelerate efforts towards greater environmental sustainability within textile and garment production. Such efforts should aim to reduce the sector's environmental footprint by greening production and employment at all levels, while contributing to increased resilience, equity and productivity within the sector (Martinez and Sharpe 2020). This includes creation of new "green" jobs and addressing market and non-market barriers to the adoption of cleaner production (Martinez and Sharpe 2020). Moving decisively in this direction will require a shared vision among stakeholders that brings together economic, social and environmental objectives, and builds on existing momentum for an equitable and sustainable sector. Ensuring women's voice, representation and leadership within strategies and initiatives to green the sector will be critical to ensure gender equality lies at the core of the agenda. The ILO "just transitions" framework offers a highly relevant policy reference in this context, focusing as it does on just outcomes for workers through social dialogue, multi-stakeholder cooperation and decent work at a time of intensifying climate change impacts (ILO 2015b).²³

²³ The ILO, *Guidelines for a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All* (2015) suggests that decent work, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability are three of the defining challenges of the 21st century. At the 102nd International Labour Conference (2013), the ILO adopted the Just Transition Framework and launched the Green Centenary Initiative. Building on this foundation and following the Tripartite Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Green Jobs (2015), the ILO's Governing Body endorsed the Guidelines.



►► The links between gender equality, labour rights, climate change and environmental sustainability are an everyday reality for many women workers.



► Box 20 Collective bargaining: Social dialogue in practice

Globally, numerous collective agreements provide important vehicles for:

1. addressing violence and harassment in the workplace (both improving the scope and coverage of legislation, where such exists, and filling the gap where it does not);
2. improving maternity rights; and
3. reducing wage disparities both within and across sectors and firms.

In the latter case, for example, collective agreements have focused on increased transparency of company pay differentials; higher pay rises for female-dominated job classes; and gender-neutral job evaluations to avoid gender biases in job classification and pay systems. The level of collective bargaining can also affect the gender pay gap. The more centralized the collective bargaining process, the smaller the size of the gender pay gap. The availability of formal grievance processes, together with representation, to help tackle wage complaints is also likely to promote the status and welfare of women.

Source: Djaya, Brown, and Lupo 2019.

► Box 21 Multi-stakeholder platforms: Strengthening joint action for change

Equal Pay International Coalition – Campaigning together for equal pay

Launched in Asia and the Pacific in 2018, the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) acts at the global, regional and national levels to support governments, employers' and workers' organizations, and other stakeholders to take concrete steps to reduce the gender pay gap. Led by the ILO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UN Women, EPIC aims to accelerate progress towards gender pay equity by raising awareness, sharing knowledge, embracing innovation, and scaling up initiatives and programmes that have already yielded positive results.

A key EPIC objective is the universal ratification of Convention No. 100 by 2030, as well as visible efforts and results by governments and the private sector to implement equal pay initiatives. EPIC provides support to improve legislation, build capacity and strengthen monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Recognizing that widespread awareness grounded in empirical evidence is crucial for tackling the discrimination that often reinforces the gender pay gap, EPIC's work includes advocacy campaigns and equal pay conferences, meetings and sharing of good practices to increase public awareness and media coverage on the issue.

National employers' and workers' organizations from Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea are part of EPIC in Asia and the Pacific. A number of private sector companies, CSOs and influential individual equal pay champions are also part of the coalition.

Multi-stakeholder platforms promote joint action on violence and harassment in the garment sectors of in Bangladesh and Indonesia

Multi-stakeholder platforms to promote gender equality in the garment sectors of Bangladesh and Indonesia provide relevant examples for similar joint efforts across the region. The two platforms emerged from a regional forum on gender-based violence in the garment industry held in Viet Nam in 2017. The forum was part of Fair Wear's strategic partnership with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the International Training Centre of the ILO. Nearly 100 participants from six garment-producing countries took part, representing NGOs,

trade unions, private sector companies and government. Following the forum, two countries – Bangladesh and Indonesia – decided to form national gender working groups as part of their national action plans.

In **Bangladesh**, eight rights-based and garment sector-related organizations formed Gender Platform Bangladesh (GPB) with the aim to bring attention to, and find ways to address and prevent, gender inequality and gender-based violence and discrimination. Their early focus was to collectively work to pressure the Government to enact a law on “Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace”, which would replace 2009 High Court guidelines in this area. The GPB drafted and submitted a law and continue to be active in lobbying and advocacy efforts to push it forward. They have also organized a learning exchange with India and advocated for the ratification of Convention No. 190. More recently, GPB’s attention has turned to jointly mitigating the harm caused by COVID-19.

The Gender Network Platform (GNP) in **Indonesia** is made up of more than 20 trade union, business, employer, NGO and other organizations and institutions active in the sector. The Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection are also involved, as is the National Commission on Violence against Women. The GNP carries out research and capacity-building; promotes gender-based violence-free zones; supports the incorporation of gender-based violence prevention in collective bargaining agreements; and develops guidelines for employers. The GNP is also supporting advocacy on the draft Bill on Sexual Harassment Alleviation and on Convention No. 190. They organized a learning trip for government officials, trade unionists and GPB members to India to learn more about how India created and implemented the 2013 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. As with the GPB, their attentions have more recently turned to addressing the impact of COVID-19 in the sector.

A key strength of both gender platforms has been their ability to bring various stakeholders together to address issues in a multi-faceted and coordinated way, drawing on the skills and networks of their members. Both platforms provide a forum for capacity building and knowledge sharing (including with counterparts in other countries), to present research and provide a space for mutual support and consultation. The opportunities provided by the platforms to foster productive relations and cooperation between government and non-government actors have also been important, including on the original votes in favour of Convention No. 190 in 2019 and subsequent advocacy for its ratification.

Sources: ILO 2018d; Correspondence with Fair Wear Foundation, the Netherlands, 22 February 2021.

► **Box 22 Global and national agreements: Providing a framework for cooperative action**

Bangladesh multi-stakeholder MOU strengthens cooperation against violence and harassment

The ILO and eight local NGOs such as BRAC (Bangladesh Rural & Advancement Committee, the world's largest development NGO) and international organizations have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to work together in addressing violence and harassment (including sexual harassment) in the country's ready-made garment sector.¹ Noting the prevalence of workplace violence and harassment across all sectors in Bangladesh, the MOU states that "sexual harassment is endemic in the RMG [ready-made garment] industry in Bangladesh. Enduring abusive behaviours is an everyday experience for many female workers, including offensive and sexually explicit language and physical acts. Sexual harassment not only deprives workers of their basic rights and compromises their well-being, workers in such negative environments also tend to have lower productivity and morale and higher turnover, which directly affects the bottom line." Under the MOU, the signatories commit themselves to possible joint activities as well as sharing information, strategies and learning. Investigating the possible development of a joint training curriculum is also a focus.

Global framework agreements

Global framework agreements (GFAs) are becoming an increasingly used approach to improve industrial relations in the global supply chain in areas ranging from promoting social dialogue to freedom of association, living wages, collective bargaining and the elimination of gender-based violence in the workplace. Such agreements typically involve global brands, employers and trade unions. They aim to put in place key standards, practices and quality of work principles across a company's global operations, regardless of whether these already exist in a given country.

Key features of such agreements include the following:

1. the incorporation of global union federations as legitimate bargaining partners;
2. the promotion of the fundamental ILO Conventions and decent work along global supply chains; and
3. a focus on establishing systems of workers' voice and participation.

Most GFAs include reference to fundamental ILO Conventions with respect to gender equality, and several commit to preventing harassment and discrimination against women. ILO/ACTRAV observes that, even where progress in implementing GFAs is limited, they may still have a positive "crystallizing effect" on gender equality awareness within firms and along their supply chains.

¹ Signatories are: Business for Social Responsibility (United States); BRAC (Bangladesh); CARE Bangladesh; Ethical Trading Initiative (United Kingdom); Fair Wear Foundation (the Netherlands); Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ, Germany); Oxfam (Bangladesh); Plan International Bangladesh; SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (Bangladesh).

A major garment sector initiative in this context has been the formation of Action, Collaboration, Transformation (ACT). This agreement brings together some 20 global brands and retailers with trade unions to transform the garment, textile and footwear industry and achieve living wages for workers through collective bargaining at the industry level linked to purchasing practices. Collective bargaining at the industry level means that workers within a country can negotiate their wages under the same conditions, regardless of the factory they work in or the retailers and brands for which they produce. Linking collective bargaining to purchasing practices means that payment of the negotiated wage is supported and enabled by the terms of contracts with global brands and retailers.

ACT is the first global commitment on living wages in the garment sector that provides a framework through which all relevant actors – including brands and retailers, trade unions, manufacturers, and governments – can exercise their responsibility and roles in achieving living wages. ACT members have agreed upon the following principles:

1. a joint approach based on all participants in global supply chains assuming their respective responsibilities in achieving freedom of association, collective bargaining and living wages;
2. agreement that a living wage should be reached at the industry level through collective bargaining between employers and workers and their representatives; and
3. support for workers to freely exercise their right to organize and bargain collectively in accordance with ILO Conventions.

Sources: IndustriALL 2018; 2019a; 2019b; Rubery and Johnson 2019.

► 2.3 Pulling it all together: Theory of change

The following theory of change diagram²⁴ draws on the preceding analysis and identifies core strategies, high-level impacts and enabling factors to move the needle on gender equality within the garment sector supply chains of Asia.

This “theory of change” aims to provide a framework for partnership and cooperation between Asian garment sector stakeholders to achieve a sustainable sector that is gender-responsive and more resilient, equitable and productive. Enabling policy frameworks are set out that provide leverage and weight to the change process, while a diverse array of actors are identified who in many cases are already collaborating at different levels within the rapidly evolving sector globally and regionally.

Central to the theory of change is the realization in the garment sector of pay equity; an end to discrimination, harassment and violence; a rebalancing of responsibilities for unpaid care;

and achievement of equal voice, representation and leadership by women at all levels. Each of these critical thematic areas constitutes a game changer element within the theory of change.

A key step in the operationalization of the theory of change has been the development of the “Regional Road Map – Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work in Asia’s Garment Sector (2021).” This road map includes mutually-reinforcing priorities and actions at regional and country levels. These draw on the analysis in this paper and link to existing relevant global, regional and national policy frameworks, commitments, platforms and initiatives. The road map was developed in consultation with members of the Gender Task Force under the Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains in Asia project of the ILO, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

²⁴ The United Nations Development Group (2017, 4) describes a theory of change as a “method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to a specific change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence”.

Key Issues

Impact of COVID-19 on jobs/job security, working conditions and livelihoods of women in garment supply chains

Systemic pay inequities, long hours, poor working conditions affecting women's health and well-being

Lack of access to promotion opportunities and skills development

Unsafe conditions, sexual harassment and violence, including when travelling to and from work

Discrimination related to pregnancy and sexual/reproductive health/rights

Women's disproportionate unpaid care burden, absence of child care, lack of men's involvement in unpaid care

Lack of appropriate social protection mechanisms and access

Barriers to leadership, voice and representation across sector, including in employers' bodies and unions

Impacts on workers' conditions, health and livelihoods of climate change and environmental sustainability issues

Change Strategies

Leverage power/influence of international brands/buyers and consumers

Leverage/promote international human/labour rights frameworks - hold duty bearers to account

Link priorities of formal and informal women workers

Prioritize social dialogue as core vehicle for stakeholder engagement for change

Influence/leverage laws, policies and strategies which promote women's rights, including on social protection and trade

Prioritize addressing unpaid care as strategic "game-changer" and infrastructure investment

Leverage and engender garment sector Call to Action to maximize impact

Increase women's leadership, voice and representation within social dialogue, sector employer and worker organizations, COVID-19 response recovery plans and collective bargaining by developing sector strategies to close this gap

Engage/support women at all levels in just transitions around technological and climate change

Build inclusive multi-stakeholder international/national partnerships for change

Conduct strategic research and improve data collection and use to inform policy, advocacy and actions

Leverage linkages between gender equality, labour, climate change and environmental sustainability to promote a new "Green Deal" in the sector

Enabling Frameworks

International Labor Conventions C087 on freedom of association/ right to organize; C098 on right to organize and collective bargaining; C100 on equal pay; C111 on discrimination; C156 on workers with family responsibilities; C177 on home work; C183 on maternity protection; and C190 on violence and harassment

SDGs 1, 5 and 8

CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and other human rights commitments

National laws and policies on labour, gender equality, gender-based violence and social protection

COVID-19: Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry

Tripartite Declaration of Principles on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy; OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment/ Footwear Sector

Key Actors

Garment sector employers and associations at international and national levels

Governments, including ministries/agencies for planning, labour, women and social protection

Social dialogue mechanisms

Trade unions at international and national levels

Global/regional /national multi-stakeholder coalitions and garment sector campaigns

Women's and other CSOs

ILO and other international agencies

International brands/buyers

International investors

Intermediate Impacts

Equal pay for work of equal value transparently applied and monitored across all aspects of garment sector supply chains

Gender parity in leadership, management and decision-making at all levels within garment sector supply chains

High Level Impacts

Goal

Gender equality in all aspects of garment sector supply chains in Asia

Increased inclusion, gender equality, productivity, sustainability and competitiveness of the sector

Safe and healthy workplaces which are free of discrimination, violence and harassment and support women's health and wellbeing

Reduced double paid/unpaid work burden for women through affordable child care; reduced/flexible working hours; maternity protection, paternity and parental leave

► Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed for continuing joint stakeholder action to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while simultaneously moving towards a more sustainable garment sector in Asia, one that is resilient, equitable and productive. These recommendations accommodate national diversity; are highly interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They aim to support action by governments, employers, workers, NGOs, international agencies and other actors, both collectively and in their own right.

Prioritize and promote joint stakeholder actions at all levels of the sector to continue addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while simultaneously improving gender equality in the garment sector in Asia in the longer term.

- Leverage the ILO's COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry as a key framework for joint efforts in this regard, especially in those Asian countries initially prioritized by the International Working Group set up to promote and coordinate the Call to Action²⁵. Link implementation of the Call to Action with other existing international platforms and agreements that support change in global and regional supply chains.²⁶
- Promote and implement policies, strategies and measures to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment commitments constitute a central element of the COVID-19

response and recovery in both formal and informal aspects of the sector.

- Ensure that purchasing practices that affect the wages and working conditions of women in the sector are also addressed as part of multi-stakeholder sector reform dialogue and initiatives.
- Strengthen the capacity of world of work institutions to take concrete actions and advance gender equality in the garment sector.

The Call to Action is a time-bound addition, in specific circumstances, to the array of relevant international frameworks and commitments touching on labour rights, working conditions and gender equality in the global garment sector. As experience has already demonstrated, implementation of the Call to Action at the national level is a complex task. The proactive engagement of all stakeholders is required if the document is to be more than a paper commitment.

Significant investments of intellectual, financial, technical and social capital are being made on a daily basis to various international multi-stakeholder platforms and tools that are already in place and functioning effectively in their own spheres. As the annex to this report shows, many of these platforms and tools enjoy a high degree of commonality of focus and approach. Indeed, the Call to Action provides a commitment to action that can be leveraged to strengthen

²⁵ These countries are: Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Pakistan.

²⁶ These include the:

- ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work;
- ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization;
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration);
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises;
- OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment & Footwear Sector; and
- United Nations (UN) Framework for the Immediate Socio-economic Response to COVID-19.

synergies and harmonize efforts towards shared objectives, priorities and outcomes.

The theory of change presented in section 2.3 above reflects the centrality of this paper's four priority themes in promoting initiatives for transformative sectoral change, including in the current COVID-19 pandemic context. Without pay equity in line with the commitments made by governments in the region's garment-producing countries, there is no prospect for genuine equality and recognition of women's value in the sector. Without effective and adequately resourced policy and measures to address the unequal distribution of unpaid care work within the household, women will face ongoing barriers to their full and equal participation at all levels of the sector. Without the elimination of violence and harassment, women will continue to face rights violations and be prevented from engaging fully, freely and equally in the workplace. And without women winning greater voice, representation and leadership, the drive and sustained commitment needed for systemic change across all the above areas is unlikely to be realized.

Prioritize attention to the achievement of equal pay for work of equal value across the garment sector in line with the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and SDG 8.5.

- Strengthen, monitor and enforce national policies and laws on equal pay for work of equal value, as well as minimum wage levels, in line with international commitments and guidance from international labour standards.
- Ensure women's voices, representation and leadership are central to all initiatives and social dialogue concerning gender pay equity and minimum wage levels. Prioritize women-intensive sectors for attention in national minimum wage level negotiations.
- At the company/employer level, review and adjust hiring and promotion policies as well as wage and salary systems to ensure use of gender-neutral job evaluations to identify "work of equal value".

While the majority of Asia's garment producing countries have ratified Convention No. 100, gender pay gaps remain systemic throughout the region's garment sector. At the root of the persistent gaps is the impact of discriminatory social norms which undervalue women's roles and work, along with structural factors such as women's segregation in export industries, the increased mobility of firms and the concentration of women at the "very end" of global supply chains, where regulations are likely to be weakest and competitive pressures strongest (Sequino 2005; Rubery and Johnson 2019; ILO 2018c).

Addressing this issue is thus more than just a technical matter, but is intimately linked with tackling the wider array of gender inequalities across the sector. A number of well proven approaches exist to rebalance current inequities. These include putting international and national pay equity commitments at the centre of social dialogue at all levels in the sector; stepping up labour inspectorate monitoring of implementation of these commitments at enterprise level; and the use by employers of gender-neutral job evaluations to identify "work of equal value". Lifting minimum wage levels is another factor in the improving the position of women in the sector. Inter alia this requires that gender-intensive industries such as garment production are prioritized in national minimum wage processes.

Prioritize, develop and support policies, strategies and measures to increase women's voice, representation and leadership in all aspects of the garment sector.

- Promote, strengthen and implement existing national policies, laws, strategies and plans on promoting women in leadership and management at all levels, including in business (for example, national quota provisions, where they exist).
- Initiate and implement policies and measures to promote women's voice, representation and leadership social dialogue processes at all levels of the sector (from national to enterprise), including COVID-19 response and recovery and collective bargaining.

- ▶ Establish policies and measures to increase the number and participation of women in leadership and management roles within employers' and workers' organizations in the sector, including through establishing gender quotas or targets and providing leadership development opportunities, mentorships and sponsorships for women.
- ▶ Initiate and support measures to increase the number and participation of women in workplace leadership, management, supervision and bipartite committee roles. In this context, address barriers that constrain women's career advancement, voice, representation and leadership, including the influence of discriminatory social norms, lack of quality and affordable childcare, violence and harassment, and lack of skills development opportunities.
- ▶ Promote positive role models of women in leadership and management in the garment sector as well as in the economy as a whole.

The gender inequalities in voice, representation and leadership across all levels of the region's garment sector have severe consequences on a daily basis for women workers – evidenced by the general lack of systematic attention paid to addressing the core issues underpinning this paper. If women's priorities and needs are not central to sector decision-making in all spheres, the many gender equality commitments made at global, governmental and corporate levels will remain unrealized where it counts – in pay packets, working conditions, safe and healthy workplaces, and improved lives and prospects for women workers, their families and communities.

As observed earlier, gender parity in voice, representation and leadership is not just about numbers; it is about a substantive and tangible sharing of power, for which governments and all sector institutions and organizations need to be accountable. The use of temporary gender quotas in business, employers' organizations and workers' organization is one proven measure that is being increasingly applied globally to rectify longstanding gender imbalances.

Prioritize, develop and support policies, strategies and measures to eradicate violence and harassment within the garment sector, including gender-based violence, in line with the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

- ▶ Prioritize the promotion, implementation and ratification of Convention No. 190 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 as a central focus for multi-stakeholder advocacy and action within the sector, linking with initiatives to this end in wider society.
- ▶ Ensure the promotion and application within the sector of existing national policies, laws and strategies on gender equality, gender-based violence and women's health and wellbeing, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- ▶ Ensure that women's voice, representation and leadership are at the centre of all sector decision-making and social dialogue on policies and measures concerning violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.
- ▶ Ensure employers' organizations and workers' organizations are aware of and contribute to implementation of international commitments and national policies and laws to eradicate violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, in the world of work.
- ▶ Through social dialogue processes involving employers and workers, establish enterprise policies, procedures, safe complaint mechanisms, workplace committees, training programmes for managers and supervisors, and worker awareness programmes to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence, in line with Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206.

Violence and harassment are endemic across the region's garment sector. As one of the starkest manifestations of gender inequality and abuse of human rights in the sector, gender-based violence and sexual harassment affect millions of women workers on a daily basis. The impacts

have intensified as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, and range from the devastated lives of women workers to huge productivity losses for the industry. Violence and harassment further constitute a major barrier to women's voice, representation and leadership in the sector.

The response needs to likewise be systemic, addressing deep-seated discriminatory social norms and touching all aspects of the day-to-day management and operation of enterprises across the sector. Increasingly a key driver of sector stakeholder actions to address gender-based violence and harassment is the recently adopted ILO Convention No. 190. The opportunity exists now to position this Convention as a strategic galvanizing force at the centre of collective action to eradicate violence and harassment in the sector. Progress in this critical area will, in turn, help trigger progress on other gender inequality issues in the sector through raised awareness, increased advocacy capacities, and enhanced networks and cooperation for positive change.

Prioritize attention to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of the disproportionate unpaid care work responsibilities carried by women in the garment sector, in line with the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183):²⁷

- Promote education and public awareness-raising to challenge and shift discriminatory social norms regarding the roles of women and men with respect to unpaid care work.
- Encourage and promote the engagement of men in unpaid care work.
- Develop policies, strategies, measures and investments for accessible and quality care services and decent work for care workers, using tripartite dialogue and involving women workers.

- Expand and increase collectively financed maternity rights and protection, as well as parental and paternity leave and promote more family-friendly workplace policies, in line with international labour standards.
- Link such initiatives with the COVID-19 Call to Action in the Global Garment Industry and other efforts to expand social protection policy and coverage to address the needs of women, especially those in informal and vulnerable situations exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing the barriers posed by unpaid care and domestic work to women engaged in and staying in the workforce will represent a strategic and critical contribution to “moving the needle” on gender equality within Asia's garment sector supply chains. The disproportionate responsibilities carried by women in this respect undermine their ability to engage fully and freely in the labour market, create time poverty, limit mobility and limit access to education and training opportunities. They also represent an important factor in the high levels of women's engagement in informal employment across the region, without access to labour and social protections.

Improved childcare provision and maternity protection bring benefits not only to women workers and their families, but also to employers in terms of a more stable workforce and improved production. The wider benefits of generating more paid care work, skills training and employment opportunities for women should also be a priority in advancing this agenda. Key imperatives in addressing these and related issues are shifting discriminatory gender-related social norms and encouraging men to be full and equal participants in unpaid care and domestic work. The ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), further calls for including maternity protection as part of national social protection systems. ILO calculations show that this is not only affordable and feasible in all countries, but would also contribute to social and economic development.

²⁷ The full set of ILO policies and measures with respect to gender equality around unpaid care work is set out under the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work. The 5Rs are: recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; reward paid care work, by promoting more and decent work for care workers; and guarantee care workers' representation, social dialogue and collective bargaining. The 5R-related policies and measures are guided by international labour standards (ILO 2018a).

Prioritize, promote and practice gender-inclusive social dialogue at all levels, including within the workplace.

- Ensure that gender inclusion is real, substantive and premised on systematic, trackable and accountable measures to achieve equality in voice, representation and leadership.

Gender-inclusive social dialogue and tripartism are primary and proven vehicles for developing partnerships capable of advancing policy responses to promote long-term sectoral transformation. The imperative has never been higher for such institutions and processes to be in place and functioning effectively within the garment sector, with women's voices at their core. Collective bargaining and agreements at the national, sector and enterprise levels are one form of critically important social dialogue for the future of the sector as a whole, as well as for the majority of workers, who are women.

Accelerate efforts to ratify, implement and monitor International Labour Conventions and Recommendations that have a particular bearing on gender inequalities in the world of work.

- Leverage such Conventions – and associated ratification efforts and campaigns – to prioritize and promote policies and measures that contribute to gender equality and the application of international labour standards in Asia's garment sector supply chains.

International Labour Conventions of particular relevance include the:

- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100);
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111);
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156);
- Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177);

- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183); and

- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

These and other Conventions and Recommendations provide critical frameworks and leverage for all efforts to transform gender power relations and dynamics in the sector. They are unique within the global UN policy architecture in that they have been agreed between governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations after extensive research, consultation and negotiation. Underpinned by shared commitments to social justice, the Conventions are supported by an extensive array of ILO guidance advice, tools and expertise. They have the power and standing to provide considerable leverage to stakeholder efforts and cooperation to transform the basis of the garment sector globally.

Ensure that gender equality dimensions are mainstreamed into garment sector policies, strategies, plans and initiatives at all levels to strengthen environmental sustainability and address the impacts of climate change (for example, the promotion of green jobs and skills and investment in the greening of production processes that benefit all workers).

- Similarly, ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment policies, strategies, plans and initiatives at all levels take account of environmental sustainability and climate change considerations. These include the impacts on women workers' health and well-being, as well as productivity, stemming from developments such as (i) increased workplace temperatures; and (ii) the greater intensity and regularity of extreme weather events.

Although the July 2020 ILO Asian stakeholder survey on COVID-19 implications (ILO 2020g) indicated that an initial period of backlash against the push for greater environmental sustainability might ensue based on survival imperatives in the industry, it also projected that this would be followed by a period of industry collaboration to improve long-term performance.



Now is the time to ensure stronger foundations are in place for long-term improvements to the sector's environmental sustainability, coupled with a systematic push for gender equality. A more equitable and sustainable sector will help increase competitiveness and productivity while also enhancing the jobs, incomes and health of the millions of women upon whom the industry ultimately depends. To drive substantive progress in this direction, the following factors need to be proactively leveraged:

- ▶ collaboration between gender equality and environmental advocates within the sector, including consumers' groups in key markets;
- ▶ engaging ILO constituents at all levels on the basis of the agency's global commitments to gender equality and environmental sustainability; and
- ▶ applying an interconnected view of the labour, gender and environmental legislative and regulatory frameworks within which the industry operates.

Increase the overall impact of the various stakeholder campaigns, programmes and projects promoting gender equality in the garment sector across the region by: (1) seeking joint initiatives where possible; and (2) sharing knowledge, experience, lessons and good practices for wider benefit and impact.

- ▶ Encourage, facilitate and support active collaboration at regional, subregional and national levels between actors working on gender equality in the sector – including through multi-stakeholder platforms where relevant – to amplify impact, enhance regular communications and ensure the efficient use of available resources.
- ▶ Take advantage of the regional online knowledge hub established by the ILO Decent Work in the Garment Sector Supply Chain in Asia project and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ) to disseminate information, research and analysis, evaluation findings, lessons and good practices.

Stakeholder consultations carried out for the publication of this paper highlighted the importance of greater attention being paid by actors promoting gender equality in garment sector supply chains in Asia to sharing their experience, lessons and good practices with each other. Not only will this enhance mutual learning and contribute to more effective and higher impact engagements, it will also strengthen the basis for cooperation around shared priorities. In the end, the ultimate result will be stronger progress towards gender equality within the sector.

One key platform in this regard is the above-mentioned regional knowledge platform, titled the “Asia Garment Hub”. This platform, developed in partnership with the ILO and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), will serve as a one-stop online portal for industry data, information and tools to help industry stakeholders to understand, promote and operationalize decent work and sustainable business practices across the textile and garment supply chain.

Strengthen the systematic collection, use and dissemination of up-to-date, comparable, sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data to inform the development of policies, measures and social dialogue processes to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment within garment sector supply chains in Asia. Specific measures should include:

- More regular labour force surveys in garment producing countries where this is not yet the case;
- More regular time-use surveys to gather data on the gender dynamics of unpaid work, including as part of labour force surveys,²⁸ in line with resolutions of the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (2013).²⁹

- Improved collection, analysis and availability of data on trends, issues and policy options related to pay equity; discrimination, violence and harassment; unpaid care work and women’s voice, leadership and representation in sector decision-making;
- The development of a multi-stakeholder plan to: (1) map key data gaps; and (2) strengthen and support the coordination of governmental, private sector, trade union and other relevant statistical efforts to this end, including in the above areas.

Research for this paper has revealed significant data gaps and inconsistencies in areas of critical importance to the development of effective and evidence-based policies, strategies, plans and programmes to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment in Asia’s regional garment supply chains. Potential sources of the required data include national statistics organizations, the UN and other international agencies, employers’ and workers’ organizations, CSOs active in the sector and sector research bodies.

The need to ensure a sound evidence base for joint decision-making and policy formulation and monitoring concerning the future of the sector at all levels has been reinforced by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current challenges facing the sector present an opportunity to bring key stakeholders together to coordinate strategies, plans and resources to further clarify the data gaps and take steps to address these gaps in a coherent, long-term and sustainable manner.

²⁸ The ILO is exploring the potential for using time-use methods that could be attached to labour force surveys in a modular format to enable regular collection of time-spent in unpaid productive activities as a complement to national time-use surveys (ILO, n.d.-e)

²⁹ The 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013 is widely regarded as a ground-breaking event. The Conference adopted five resolutions concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization; further work on forced labour, cooperatives and labour migration; and the functioning of the Conference (ILO, n.d.-f).

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► Annex

Campaigns and tools for a transformed garment sector in Asia

A diverse array of international initiatives are acting to “move the needle” towards more sustainable, equitable and productive garment supply chains in Asia and globally. The following selection lists a number of initiatives that are active on a multi-country and/or global basis in Asia.

ACT (Action, Collaboration, Transformation): ACT is an agreement between global corporations and the IndustriALL Global Union. It aims to implement industry-level national collective bargaining agreements in an effort to secure a wage that companies will take into account in their purchasing practices.

Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA): An international alliance of trade unions and labour rights activists working together to demand garment workers are paid a living wage. AFWA began in 2005, when trade unions and labour rights activists from across Asia came together to agree a strategy for improving the lives of garment workers.

Business for Social Responsibility (BSR): A global non-profit organization that works with its network of over 250 member companies and other partners to build a just and sustainable world. BSR's HERproject aims to empower low-income women working in global supply chains, including the garment sector in Asia. HERproject brings together global brands, suppliers and local NGOs via workplace-based interventions on women's health, financial inclusion and gender equality.

CARE International: CARE's Made by Women strategy seeks to ensure women in the garment industry have access to decent jobs, are free from violence and harassment and can give voice to their rights at work. Key CARE programmes in the sector in Asia include the EKATA (Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformative Action) initiative to promote women's rights and leadership and

the “Enhancing Women's Voice to STOP Sexual Harassment (STOP) project.

Clean Clothes Campaign: Since 1989, this global network of more than 230 unions and NGOs has been dedicated to improving working conditions and empowering workers in the global garment and sportswear industries. The Clean Clothes Campaign educates and mobilizes consumers, lobbies companies and governments, and offers direct solidarity support to workers as they fight for their rights and demand better working conditions.

Ethical Trading Initiative: A multisector tripartite alliance of companies, unions and NGOs that promotes ethical trade. This is accomplished through defining and promoting best practice, providing practical training, resources and tools, supporting worker initiatives, developing strategic alliances and influencing key sector players.

Fair Wear Foundation: Focuses on garment production, specifically sewing, cutting and trimming processes (the most labour-intensive parts of the supply chain). The Fair Wear Foundation works with more than 140 member brands, and engages directly with factories, trade unions, NGOs and governments to improve working conditions and make fashion fair for everyone.

Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (German Corporation for International Development, or GIZ): Promotes women's leadership, awareness of rights and improved conditions within garment factories in selected Asia countries through initiatives such as its Women's Cafés and FABRIC (Promoting sustainability in the textile and garment industry in Asia).

Global Deal: Initiated by Sweden and now hosted by the OECD, the Global Deal for Decent Work and Inclusive Growth is an initiative for social dialogue and better conditions in the global labour market. The initiative aims to promote better wages, better working conditions, increased gender

equality and more equality for workers. The initiative encompasses over 100 governments, companies and organizations.

ILO/IFC Better Work Programme: Better Work brings together governments, brands, factory owners, unions and workers in garment-producing countries. Through such means as factory assessments, public disclosure and capacity building, Better Work improves working conditions, the implementation of ILO Conventions, compliance with national laws, and industry competitiveness.

International Finance Corporation (IFC) Childcare Programme: Promotes access to good quality, affordable childcare, including in selected Asian countries. Since 2017, the IFC has published a series of global, regional and national reports making the business case for employer-supported childcare and outlining best practices. The IFC's Global Tackling Childcare Advisory programme works with companies to aid the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies.

Oxfam: Oxfam is engaged within the garment sector in Asia as part of its gender justice and women's rights focus. Oxfam supports women in: their fight to have equal opportunities as men to secure jobs and fair pay; the participation of women in leadership and decision-making at all levels; and efforts to stop violence against women by changing laws and challenging culturally accepted practices that treat women as second-class citizens.

STAR Network (Sustainable Textile of the Asian Region): The first inter-Asian network of producer associations, the STAR Network was initiated by GIZ's FABRIC project (see above). The network brings together representatives of the producing associations from Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Pakistan and Viet Nam. Members meet regularly and work together to promote sustainable production.

Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC): Brings together more than 250 brands and vendors globally to collaborate in the promotion of improved sustainability in the garment, textile and footwear industry. A core focus of SAC collaboration is the promotion, support and use of the Higg Index, a set of tools that standardizes value chain sustainability measurement for all industry participants.

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WEIGO): A global research/policy network focused on improving conditions for workers in the informal economy. WIEGO's members include membership-based organizations of workers in the informal economy, researchers and development professionals.

The garment sector in Asia has been a key entry point for women entering the formal economy, bringing with it unprecedented opportunities for advancing women's economic empowerment. Yet, while the sector has provided millions of women with improved economic and social wellbeing, many opportunities remain yet to be realized as persistent gender gaps undermine the achievement of Decent Work for all. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has both underscored and further exacerbated many of these issues.

This report, titled *Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work in Asia's Garment Sector* summarizes the key gender gaps present throughout the garment sector and outlines strategies for action. Part one of this report provides data on four key gender issues found in the garment sector in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. Part two of this paper identifies several key messages in support of intensified action and synergies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within garment sector supply chains in Asia. Based on the information presented in parts one and two, the report then provides recommendations for joint stakeholder dialogue and action at regional and national levels within Asian garment supply chains.

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