International Labour Organization | Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains Asia

▶ **Promising practices, experiences and lessons learned in eliminating gender inequality in the garment sector in Asia**

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▶ Introduction

The garment sector has offered millions of women across Asia opportunities to improve their economic and social positions. However, despite numerous interventions and investments towards improving gender equality throughout the sector in recent decades, persistent gender gaps, many of which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, remain (ILO 2021a; ILO 2018a; Better Work 2020a; CARE International 2017).

Under the ILO's Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains Asia (DWGSCA) project, funded by the Swedish international development agency (Sida), a Call for Submissions was put out to collect evidence of promising practices towards closing gender gaps in the garment sector in Asia, with an emphasis on Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. The four key areas of consideration included the issues of: (i) pay equity; (ii) workplace discrimination, violence and harassment; (iii) unpaid care work and family responsibilities, maternity protection and paternity leave; and (iv) women's voice, representation and leadership.

The purpose of this report is to highlight findings from the received submissions, and to increase knowledge of and showcase insights on industry-relevant policies, programmes and initiatives that have been successful in closing critical gender gaps. In doing so, this brief seeks to contribute towards a shared knowledge base of "what works" in the garment sector and to identify key actions towards addressing gender gaps in the garment sector in Asia. It is important to note that achieving environmental sustainability and a Just Transition throughout the sector is an intersecting goal that is becoming increasingly important to achieving gender equality, given the gendered impacts of climate change and the subsequent impacts on women and men's employment (ILO 2020c).

This brief is structured in four parts. The first section will briefly summarize the key gender issues covered in the Call for Submissions. The next section will outline the method by which the submitted case studies were collected. The third section will highlight common themes in terms of both good practices and key challenges identified in the submissions. Finally, the fourth section will draw out key conclusions.

The case studies referenced in this publication have also been published as individual briefs, and are available on the ILO website (see Annex 1 for additional details).

▶ Background

In 2019, the ILO's Centenary Women at Work initiative reviewed evidence and identified major issues preventing gender equality in the world of work (ILO 2019a). These challenges, in the context of the garment sector, are further expanded upon in the ILO's foundational report *Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work in Asia's Garment Sector* (ILO 2021a) and its accompanying Regional Road Map (ILO 2021b). The COVID19: Call to action in the Garment Industry, an international working group convened by the ILO to respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the garment sector, also builds upon these key issue areas (ILO 2020a). These areas include:

Pay equity

Women represent the majority of the workforce in the garment and textile sector in Asia, yet women workers are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs in the lower tiers of the sector's supply chain, and consistently lag behind men in terms of pay (ILO 2021a). For example, after adjusting for differences in age, education, geographical location, industry, marital status, occupational category, urban versus rural, residence and work experience, the ILO found an average gender pay gap of around 18.5 per cent in the garment, textile and footwear sectors across Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam (Pillay 2018). While 4 per cent of this gap can be explained, approximately 14.5 per cent cannot, meaning that the pay gap is largely due to unobserved differences that may be a result of gender-based wage discrimination. In addition, jobs that are traditionally labelled as "women's work" or that are in highly feminized sectors, such as the garment sector, tend to be under-valued (ILO 2019b; ILO 2021a). While over 90 per cent of ILO Member States have ratified the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), in practice the application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value remains a challenge (ILO 2021a).

Workplace discrimination, violence and harassment

Despite accounting for a majority of the workforce in the garment sector, women generally have access to a narrow range of jobs and tasks, and face horizontal and vertical occupational segregation as well as direct and indirect discrimination based on gender (ILO 2021a). Women's labour is concentrated in the lowest-skilled and lowest-paid tasks such as weaving and sewing; whereas men tend to be employed in more technical and higher-skilled positions, such as supervisors and machinists. These attitudes and practices limit women's career progression and wage growth opportunities in the garment industry. For example, in Bangladesh, approximately four out of five production line workers are female, whereas only 1 in 20 supervisors are women (Better Work 2020a).

The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206), 2019, provide guidance on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders towards preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment. The Convention highlights that while violence and harassment are a risk to all women and men and are present in all sectors, women and girls are disproportionately affected.

Gender-based violence and harassment are prevalent throughout the garment sector, where the majority of workers are women, many of them young and/or migrants. These attributes put them at higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence and harassment due to unequal power relations and intersecting forms of discrimination. While data is limited, sexual harassment is the most widely documented form of harassment. For instance, in a baseline survey conducted in 2011, Better Work found that approximately four out of every five workers in Better Work Indonesia factories were concerned about sexual harassment and touching in the workplace (Better Work 2019a). Additional studies have found that 42.5 per cent of women workers had been sexually harassed at work in Myanmar (ILO 2018a);

▶ ILO Convention No. 190

According to Convention No. 190 effective policies are developed in consultation between workers and employers, and should:

- ▶ state that violence and harassment will not be tolerated;

- ▶ establish violence and harassment prevention programmes with measurable objectives, if appropriate;

- ▶ specify the rights and responsibilities of the workers and the employer;

- ▶ contain information on complaint and investigation procedures;

- ▶ provide that all internal and external communications related to incidents of violence and harassment will be duly considered, and acted upon as appropriate;

- ▶ specify the right to privacy of individuals and to confidentiality, while balancing the right of workers to be made aware of all hazards; and

- ▶ include measures to protect complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers against victimization or retaliation.

Source: Convention No. 190.

that 19.8 per cent of female workers and 11.9 per cent of male workers in Viet Nam experienced at least one form of violence in the previous six months (CARE International 2020); and that nearly one-third of garment workers in Cambodia had experienced sexual harassment over the previous 12 months, and that the cost of harassment in terms of productivity losses, absenteeism and turnover was approximately US$89 million per year (CARE International 2017).

There is a lack of comprehensive data on this issue across global supply chains more generally; however, the data from the garment sector has helped raise visibility of sexual harassment and has subsequently led to prioritization of the issue across various stakeholder groups, including brands, suppliers, and employers' and workers' organizations. Yet, while many stakeholders have recognized the prevalence of these issues and have made commitments to eradicating violence and harassment from global supply chains, weak social dialogue, high costs, limited resources and production pressures make it difficult for factories to address these issues with an integrated, gender-responsive and comprehensive approach. Furthermore, the significant negative consequences associated with "zero tolerance"

policies can make it more difficult to identify and address these issues within the workplace, as such policies tend to incentivize stakeholders to hide or refuse to acknowledge issues, instead of improving upon them (Better Factories Cambodia and CARE International 2021). Employers, workers, governments and brands have an important role in addressing this issue at the sectoral level. Many are already implementing policies and awareness campaigns; however, further improvements can be made.

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

Unpaid care work is the most significant barrier to women's equal and continued participation and progression in the paid workforce within Asia and the Pacific (ILO 2019b). The ILO (2018b) reports that women in this region, on average, spend more than four times as much time on unpaid care as men – and that among all the regions in the world, men in Asia and the Pacific do the least unpaid care work. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased women's unpaid care burdens (ILO 2020c; ILO 2021c). This limits women's time availability, mobility and access to training and educational opportunities; all of which hinder women's ability to improve their skills and career growth potential and involve themselves in social dialogue through Workers' and Employers' Organizations. In particular, the ILO has documented an employment, pay and leadership gap for mothers with children under 6 years old. This has significant repercussions in the garment sector, since the majority of women workers are younger women (Better Work 2018).

Casualization of the workforce also impacts women in the garment sector. Even before COVID-19, the use of short-term contracts (ILO 2018a; Better Factories Cambodia 2018), and other non-standard forms of employment, such as informal piece-rate and home-based work, put workers in a precarious position where they were excluded from social protection, healthcare and maternity benefits. The risks associated with this have been highlighted during the pandemic, where many workers lacked safety nets and access to healthcare services.

Preliminary and anecdotal evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the sector has found that women who are pregnant, nursing or on maternity leave may be more likely to be targeted for layoffs in several countries, including Bangladesh (Politzer 2020), India and Myanmar (LeBaron, et al. 2021), and Viet Nam (ILO 2020d).

Women's voice, representation and leadership

Despite accounting for the majority of the sector's workforce in most Asian countries, women remain underrepresented in social dialogue and

pay equity

discrimination, violence and harassment

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

women's voice, representation and leadership in industry decision-making
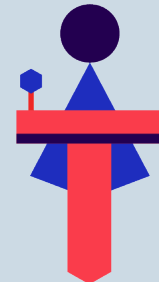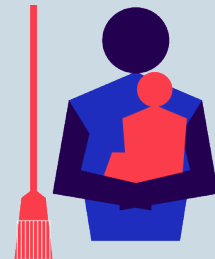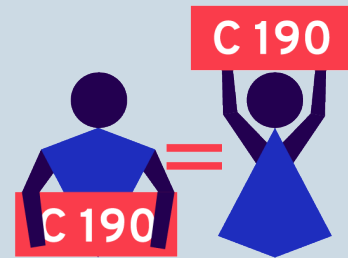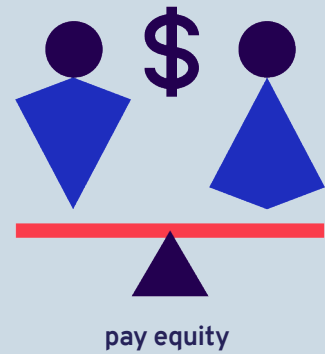
collective bargaining structures, tripartite and bipartite policy dialogue, and managerial positions. This is partially driven by perceptions of women's goals, preferences and capabilities, as well as women's disproportionate unpaid care burdens at home. Data from 2018 shows that women accounted for just 20 to 35 per cent of membership in national social dialogue institutions.

The effects of diversity and gender-parity in the workplace are overwhelmingly positive. Enterprises with inclusive policies and cultures also increase their probability of achieving enhanced profitability and productivity, heighten their ability to attract and retain talent, improve creativity innovation and openness, and boost company reputation. For example, in an ILO (2019d) survey of companies that track the impact of gender diversity in their management, the majority reported profit increases between 5 and 20 per cent. In the garment sector specifically, Better Work found that, following training, women-led production lines in surveyed garment factories experienced an average of 22 per cent increase in productivity (Babbit 2016). Additionally, Better Work also found that when women are freely and fairly elected and represented on worker–management committees, improvements in working conditions are more significant (Better Work 2016). These wide-ranging positive outcomes demonstrate the importance of ensuring that women are equally represented alongside men in leadership positions.

The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated all of these issues and has resulted in gendered impacts across the sector.[1]

At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, lockdowns severely impacted both the production of and demand for garments. Brands, suppliers and all partners along the supply chain sought to secure their financial viability, which resulted in mass cancellations of orders (initially valued at approximately US$40 billion) (Center for Global Workers' Rights and Worker Rights Consortium 2020). This left many suppliers and workers unpaid for materials that had already been purchased and/or produced and for work that had already been completed. While in subsequent months at least US$15 billion worth of orders were renegotiated and paid for, in some cases wages for work that was already completed were not paid. Garment workers across Asia lost out on an average of two to four weeks of work in the first six months of 2020 (ILO, Better Work, and Cornell University 2020). In addition, one study estimates that 160,000 workers were not paid their legally owed severance amounting to approximately US$171.5 million (WRC 2021).

Given that the garment sector in Asia is one of the largest employers of women following agriculture and that women make up approximately 80 per cent of the sector's workforce, the brunt of the pandemic's impact on workers across the garment sector was felt by women, many of whom work in the lowest levels of the supply chain.

Analysis shows that the pandemic may also accelerate the adoption of more technologically-intensive and environmentally-sustainable manufacturing (ILO 2020b; Judd and Jackson 2021), which could lead to a decrease in women's participation in the sector, as women's participation tends to fall with technological upgrading (Kucera and Tejani 2014). The potential for this underscores the importance of working towards a human-centred approach to recovery and a Just Transition within the sector, as well as continued learning on effective policies and practices, to ensure that workers, including women workers, are kept at the centre of production changes.

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1   Additional impacts detailed in ILO, "Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on the Garment Sector", ILO Brief, 2020.

▶ Method

The Call for Submissions was launched in July 2020. The invitation was shared publicly, as well as through the ILO's social partners (workers' and employers' organizations) in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam. All initiatives – including those led by workers' organizations, employers' organizations, industry (manufacturers and brands), multi-stakeholder initiatives, and other development partners, including individuals with lessons to share from Asia – were welcome to submit over a two-month period. In total, 16 submissions were received, of which, seven were selected for publication.[2]

After submissions were received, a group of five reviewers with expertise in gender and the garment sector, including members of the DWGSCA project's Gender Taskforce, were invited to review the submissions and determine whether they demonstrated promising practices. A consultation meeting was also held with the peer review group to discuss the case studies and select pieces for finalization.

Following the selection process, an analysis was conducted on each submission and common themes were drawn out. The following is a summary of the findings.[3]

▶ Findings on enabling factors

From the received submissions, several key themes emerged. These key findings are outlined below.

1. Multi-stakeholder social dialogue is critical to success

Social dialogue and collaboration with multiple stakeholders, such as governments, workers' and employers' organizations, local and international NGOs, and international organizations, are key to advancing collective action on gender gaps. Social dialogue can take many forms depending on the local context, and may include negotiation, collective bargaining, consultation and exchange of information between representatives from governments, employers' organizations and workers' organizations, as well as other stakeholders. At its core, effective social dialogue deepens understanding, develops shared priorities and helps identify practical solutions to challenges in the workplace. In order for social dialogue to be effective and gender-responsive, it is critical that women are represented and that their voice and leadership are meaningfully prioritised.

▶ The significance of social multi-stakeholder dialogue was evidenced across many interventions. For example, in Bangladesh, Fair Wear brought together diverse stakeholders to establish shared priorities and actions towards gender equality by organizing a working group to draft a national law on sexual harassment in the workplace (FW 01). The groundwork for the law was laid in 2009 when the Bangladesh Government issued a set of Guidelines on Sexual Harassment at Workplaces; however, in the 12 years following the publication of the 2009 guidelines, no government body took the initiative to enact them. Fair Wear aspired to ensure that action on the Guidelines were taken, so they worked with a number of stakeholders to draft a law. Throughout the drafting process, the group consulted with civil society organizations, Members of Parliament, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers

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2 While efforts to solicit case studies from a wide range of stakeholders were made, the serious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic likely hampered the number of submissions collected, particularly as workers' and employers' groups were intently focused on mitigating the impacts of the crisis and may not have had the resources to submit their case studies for review.

3 The submissions used to inform this brief are listed in Annex 1. Each submission in Annex 1 has been given a case study number, which will be used to make reference to the submissions throughout the remainder of this brief.

and Exporters Association, the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, educational institutions, the ILO and local and international trade unions in order to ensure widespread support and to improve awareness of the need for a law to prevent sexual harassment in the world of work. The draft law was submitted to the Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and to the Minister of Labour and Employment for their approval in 2018.

▶ Better Work also relies heavily on social dialogue to bring together international buyers, governments, suppliers, workers and their representatives to discuss and identify practical solutions to key issues within the industry. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Better Work Indonesia sought to promote dialogue between management and workers on difficult issues related with wages, benefits, and occupational safety and health by launching a social media campaign. The campaign included a series of weekly Instagram live sessions that connected resource persons, such as a representative of the Ministry of Manpower, field experts and representatives from factories, directly with workers in order to answer questions related to work and wellbeing during the pandemic. More than 200 people joined the live sessions over a dedicated period (Better Work 2020b).

As demonstrated in these examples, open and effective social dialogue is key to facilitating conversation and deepening understanding. It enables diverse parties to communicate their perspectives and priorities, and creates opportunities for stakeholders to reconcile their differing situations and identify more integrated solutions.

2. Capacity building must be comprehensive and go beyond women on the factory floor

While efforts directed towards women can and do have meaningful effects on improving knowledge on rights and skills in the workplace, efforts that do not include the engagement of all partners, including men, or go beyond training alone are limited in their impact. Gender gaps are rooted in social norms that prescribe certain behaviours, responsibilities and skills to specific genders. Addressing these issues through a comprehensive and transformative agenda, which includes gender-responsive policy change and supporting efforts to create enabling enivronments and respectful workplaces, is therefore critical to achieving women's equality in the world of work (ILO 2021a; ILO 2019b). Effective interventions include commitment, cooperation and active participation from all levels within the organization – this includes factory CEOs, employers, managers, supervisors, workers and brands.

▶ For instance, in their workplace education programme on violence and harassment prevention, Fair Wear found that actively including senior management in the implementation of the initiative significantly increased ownership of and commitment to improving programme outcomes, and also decreased the likelihood of participants dropping out of the programme (FW 03). Fair Wear also found that including floor managers was critical to ensuring that trainings did not interfere with production plans and targets, or that when trainings did interfere, they could be re-scheduled or participation could be negotiated.

▶ Additionally, an evaluation conducted by CARE International found that in cases where supervisors were not supportive of worker training, conflict on the factory floor could increase (CARE 01). This may have been a negative response to workers' increased attempts to communicate and raise issues and concerns as a result of the trainings. CARE International also found that workers' families may even react negatively to women's participation in activities if they take place after working hours, sometimes accusing them of disregarding their families.

Accordingly, it is critical that partners at every level be engaged in order to ensure that there is an understanding of the benefits of gender equality and an awareness of the systemic issues that slow improvement, and this engagement needs to be embraced from both the top–down, as well as from the bottom–up. This will require partnership among not only governments, employers' organizations and

workers' organizations, but also men, local authorities and workers' families to ensure that persistent obstacles, such as care work and gendered stereotypes, are addressed so that women can participate in the workforce on equal terms with men.

3. Efforts must be implemented over an extended period of time

Successful interventions go beyond a single training or activity. Meaningful improvements can be made when efforts are seen as more than a one-off exercise, and are instead integrated into a gender-responsive and systemic strategy that is implemented over an extended period of time. On-going efforts, with multiple opportunities for follow-up, monitoring and evaluation can lead to lasting change by reinforcing a shift in workplace norms and expectations.

▶ For example, BSR's HERrespect project, aimed at raising awareness of violence and harassment in the workplace, operates a 12-month programme consisting of six modules that are delivered on-site (BSR 01). An evaluation on the programme's efforts in one factory in 2019 found that after participating in the programme, the number of participants who considered "supervisors punishing employees is a normal and acceptable occurrence" decreased from 50 per cent to 6 per cent; believing that a woman deserves to be beaten sometimes decreased from 32 per cent to 4 per cent; women who felt uncomfortable reporting an instance of sexual harassment went from 57 per cent to 10 per cent; and participants who believed that suggestive or offensive comments from supervisors were normal went from 32 per cent to 0.

▶ Likewise, Better Work's programme operates on a one-year timeframe and includes assessments, advisory visits, industry seminars and tailored training opportunities. This comprehensive approach, which focuses on core labour standards as well as working conditions, has led to a reduction in excessive overtime, probationary contracts and gender pay gaps in participating factories (Better Work 2016). The level of improvement tends to increase the longer that companies participate in the programme.

These approaches demonstrate that longevity has an important impact in sustaining gains towards improved working conditions. By repeatedly defining and practicing new norms related to gender-responsive practices, workplaces can transform their cultures and improve standards of decent work for women and men, while also enhancing other business outcomes.

4. Legislation and shared frameworks are critical

In order to deliver substantial improvements in gender equality in the world of work, it is important to have formal and gender-responsive agreements and legally binding measures in place. While verbal commitments can lead to positive action, on their own they often lack the incentives needed to drive substantial change, particularly when factories do not have a stake in the success of the programme or when they have a disincentive to participate. For example, managers may not want to implement trainings on violence and harassment due to fear that trainings may lead to increased reporting of inappropriate behaviour and risk future business.

Additionally, while some companies may have a policy, if there is no legislation or sectoral agreement in place, progress towards reducing gender gaps will continue to be uneven, and the sector will pay the cost in terms of competing outcomes and poor enforcement. However, by creating a shared baseline and reducing competition based on poor labour standards, progress can be made more effectively.

▶ For example, Fair Wear reported that legislation in India and the High Court directive in Bangladesh on the enactment of workplace anti-harassment committees have provided increased credibility and support for implementing anti-harassment trainings, compared to other countries where such legal requirements do not exist (FW 01).

▶ Additionally, Better Work and CARE International have developed standardised guidance on effectively addressing gender-based violence and harassment for garment sector stakeholders. These guidelines, along with their implementation guides, offer brands, retailers, licensors, licensees, agents, manufacturing groups and factories, as well as governments, employer and industry associations, trade unions and non-profit organisations with detailed guidance on preventing and responding to GBVH in the garment sector (Better Factories Cambodia & CARE International 2021).

International labour standards are internationally recognized standards designed to provide guidance and a common minimal framework for improving on working conditions. International labour standards are negotiated in partnership between governments, workers' groups and employers' groups through the annual International Labour Conference and establish tripartite consensus on minimally acceptable standards for decent work. When adopted and effectively implemented by individual countries, the comprehensive nature of international labour standards not only can drive a shared policy agenda and identify legislature gaps to be addressed, but can also provide a powerful framework through which workers' and employers' representatives and governments can partner together to ensure a world of work that provides social justice and decent work for all.

▶ Most recently, the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206), which were adopted in 2019, represent a significant step forward in combatting violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, in the world of work. Since the Convention's adoption, national and international non-governmental organizations, international organizations, trade unions, businesses and governments have worked together to campaign for its ratification by individual countries.

▶ For example, CARE International has developed sexual harassment prevention policies, implementation guides and training materials to help employers implement and comply with the national legal contexts in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam (CARE n.d).

Formal commitments not only provide legal protection and recourse to ensure that rights are respected in the world of work, but they also outline clear roles and responsibilities of workers and employers and enhance legitimacy and, when done correctly, provide involved parties with clear guidance on what is considered acceptable at work. It is therefore critical that formal and gender-responsive agreements and legally binding measures be implemented under the leadership of the national government, with the support of workers' and employers' organizations, in order to drive improvements towards gender equality throughout the garment sector.

▶ Key challenges

Overlapping key challenges and the intersecting nature of a transformative agenda towards gender equality in the world of work were identified across the submissions. These difficulties are symptoms of the root causes of gendered issues, namely social norms and barriers to women's participation, and underscore the importance of addressing the underlying issues in order to ensure progress towards gender equality. Some of the key challenges identified by in the case studies included:

1. Social norms are a barrier to uptake

Gendered social norms shape the ways in which men and women interact both inside and outside of the workplace, and how they participate in initiatives to improve gender equality across the garment sector.

▶ For instance, as part of their efforts to implement a new digital wage payment system among 186,000 garment workers in Bangladesh, BSR found that norms such as women being less likely than men to own phones and bank accounts, as well as being more likely to face mobility constraints and time poverty due to disproportionate levels of care work were barriers to transitioning women to a digital wage payment system (BSR 02).

Additionally, topics such as gender-based sexual harassment are rooted in deeply held norms and beliefs that are, in many contexts, challenging to speak about. Despite there being a number of reports that have found that such practices are widespread throughout the sector, some enterprises and brands are hesitant or unwilling to acknowledge that gender-based violence and harassment exists or to commit to eradicating it from the workplace. This is driven in part by fear of losing business and foreign investments or damaging their reputation, as well as by social norms that tolerate and accept such behaviours throughout the sector.

The challenge of overcoming barriers arising from social norms are compounded by the fact that the majority of decision-makers and employees in leadership positions are men; whereas those at the lowest tiers of the supply chain are predominantly women. This means that activities are less likely to cater to women's specific needs and that women's voices and solutions are often not represented. Additionally, this can also result in women refraining from taking steps towards reducing gender inequalities due to social norms that suggest that such challenging such behaviours is inappropriate for women and could result in job loss or other forms of backlash.

This finding highlights the importance of addressing the root cause of negative gender norms in order to improve gender equality in the garment sector. This includes ensuring that both men and women learn about gender norms and harmful masculinities and develop increased awareness of unconscious bias as well as intersecting inequalities. Recognizing how other gendered issues such as maternity, reproductive health and rights, and women's voice, representation and leadership are impacted by limiting and harmful gender norms will also contribute towards addressing this issue. Also critical to effectively addressing these issues is the involvement of workers (including women workers) in the design of solutions.

2. The perception of turnover and actual turnover are obstacles

High turnover, which is prevalent throughout the garment sector, is a symptom of poor and intense working conditions (Andersson, Machiels, and Bodwell 2019), low wages, and systemic gender barriers such as disproportionate unpaid care duties. Failure to address these underlying issues not only leads to turnover, but also underleveraging of such investments - and thwarts women's ability to progress according to their ambitions as well as difficulty sustaining the implementation of better practices as trained workers leave the factory.

▶ For instance, Fair Wear found that factories were resistant to training migrant workers because managers believe that migrants would not stay at the factory (FW 03).

▶ Likewise, Better Work highlighted that managers have been hesitant to provide training to supervisors because they perceived it would improve their competitiveness for securing employment with other suppliers and therefore incentivize them to leave after receiving the training (Better Work 2019c).

While it is true that high turnover throughout the sector more generally could slow progress in sustaining training gains, several studies have found that training actually decreases turnover at the factory-level.

▶ Better Work, for example, found that after engaging in capacity building of workers, not only were supervisors less likely to leave, but workers who were supervised by women who participated in Better Work trainings were also less likely to leave (Better Work 2019c).

▶ Similarly, Fair Wear's training focused on establishing workplace complaints committees in India and Bangladesh among approximately 6,600 workers (19,000 including those who then received peer-to-peer trainings) and 3,233 supervisors led to increased satisfaction among workers, decreased employee turnover and a reduction in the number of legal proceedings among 93 factories (FW 03).

These cases illustrate that contrary to the perception that the benefits of training workers are limited, training can in fact have significant pay offs in terms of improved productivity and reduced turnover, as the cost of turnover measured through lost productivity associated with absenteeism, recruiting and training new workers, tends to be underestimated. One estimate by Nalt Enterprises found that the training costs and productivity losses associated with 10 per cent staff turnover cost the factory 8.5 per cent of their total annual wage bill (IFC 2013). Therefore, while high turnover is common throughout the industry and has been identified as an obstacle to developing and sustaining gains towards gender equality, these studies demonstrate that investing in employees' capacities is a good investment that not only supports better results within the workplace, but also supports women's potential to transition to better and higher-skilled jobs in the long run.

3. COVID-19 risks stalling or reversing progress on reducing gender gaps

The serious social and economic impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have presented stakeholders with significant challenges, and for many this has led to a shift in focus towards business survival. As a result, issues related to gender equality have been pushed further down the priority list, despite the gendered-impacts of the pandemic on women and men workers (ILO 2020c).

Disproportionate care responsibilities are a significant barrier to women's full return to work and ILO data documents a rise in women's detachment from the labour force during the COVID-19 panedmic, likely due to the increased unpaid care burdens (ILO 2021c). Garment workers faced additional challenges from disruptions in creche or childcare services both within and outside of the workplace, lock-down requirements that require school-aged children to stay at home, and mobility limitations that reduce access to childcare and increased time spent on commuting to and from work, particularly in the absence of company-provided transportation.

Additionally, instances of violence and harassment, especially against women, have increased during the pandemic. While data has been collected on increased levels of violence and harassment within the household more generally, little information has been published on increased instances of violence and harassment in the workplace. Yet, amid heightened stress levels and significant economic challenges, anecdotal evidence collected by the ILO suggests that garment workers are willing to accept poor work conditions and are reluctant to report instances of labour abuse due to fear of losing their jobs and being unable to access other forms of employment throughout the pandemic.

It remains to be seen as to how the sector will fully recover and if it will indeed build back better with enhanced gender-responsiveness and environmental sustainability, or if it will be a return to "business as usual".

▶ Conclusions

While the garment sector has contributed towards economic opportunities and social improvements for millions of women across Asia, significant gaps remain. The Regaional Road Map produced under the Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains Asia project outlines specific actions that can be taken to address these issues.

The findings and challenges drawn out from this Call for Submissions aim to highlight some of the approaches and positive advancements that industry stakeholders have made towards closing gender gaps throughout the garment sector and to encourage additional discussion on ways forward.

The key findings from the submitted case studies highlight the importance of:

1. Establishing effective multi-stakeholder social dialogue mechanisms and prioritising gender eqality in social dialogue between industry stakeholders, including governments, workers' representatives and employers' representatives;

2. Encouraging the inclusion of and collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders in training activities, including men, supervisors and workers;

3. Using an integrated and gender-responsive approach that is linked to policy changes over an extended period of time to address the root causes of systemic issues and support sustainable change;

4. Leveraging shared frameworks, including legal frameworks and international labour standards, to improve commitment and effective implementation among stakeholders across global supply chains;

5. Addressing social norms that limit women's potential more broadly by addressing the deeper and underlying drivers of gender inequality and by taking concrete actions towards equality;

6. Investing in training and long-term capacity development in order to improve workplace satisfaction, productivity and working conditions and to lower turnover and associated costs;

7. Taking specific action to address the adverse and gendered-impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector and to embed gender equality priorities, such as unpaid care burdens, women's representation and leadership, pay equity, and discrimination, violence and harassment into COVID-19 response and recovery.

While more research is needed, in particular on the benefits of consistently addressing gender equality and environmental sustainability, it is clear that all garment sector stakeholders have a role to play in making decent work a reality. These findings affirm the importance of dialogue and continued learning about effective approaches towards improving gender equality in the garment sector, particularly for a strong and gender-responsive recovery from COVID-19 impacts. Addressing the remaining gender gaps in the sector will take intentionality, as this change won't come automatically. However, the positive rewards will benefit women and men workers, companies' bottom lines and the sector at large.
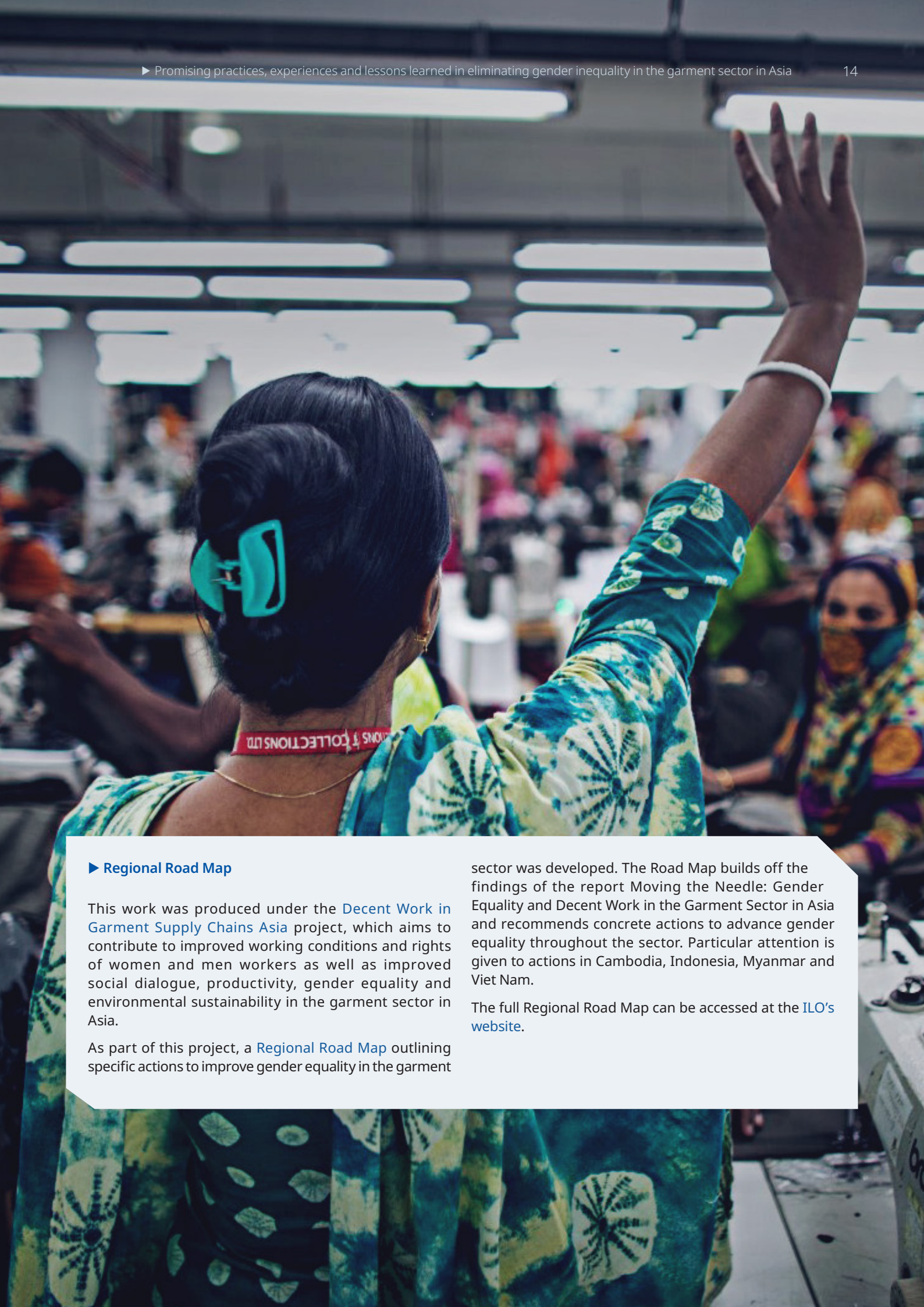
▶ Regional Road Map

This work was produced under the Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains Asia project, which aims to contribute to improved working conditions and rights of women and men workers as well as improved social dialogue, productivity, gender equality and environmental sustainability in the garment sector in Asia.

As part of this project, a Regional Road Map outlining specific actions to improve gender equality in the garment sector was developed. The Road Map builds off the findings of the report Moving the Needle: Gender Equality and Decent Work in the Garment Sector in Asia and recommends concrete actions to advance gender equality throughout the sector. Particular attention is given to actions in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar and Viet Nam.

The full Regional Road Map can be accessed at the ILO's website.

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▶ Annex 1

Case study no.	Submitting organization	Name of submission
BSR 01	Business for Social Responsibility	Suppliers committed to eliminate gender-based violence in the garment sector in Bangalore, India (HERrespect)
BSR 02	Business for Social Responsibility	Migrating to digital wages with gender lenses in the garment sector in Dhaka, Bangladesh (HERfinance)
CARE 01	CARE International	Eliminating Gender Inequality in the Garment Sector in Asia Pacific
FW 01	Fair Wear	Gender network platforms in Bangladesh and Indonesia: collective action to address gender equality in the garment sector
FW 02	Fair Wear	CARE's Interventions to Build Women's Voice in the Garment Supply Chain in Asia
FW 03	Fair Wear	Fair Wear Workplace Education Programme on violence and harassment prevention as a means to address gender in-equality in garment factories

Promising practices, experiences and lessons learned in eliminating gender inequality in the garment sector in Asia

The garment sector has offered millions of women across Asia opportunities to improve their economic and social positions. However, despite numerous interventions and investments towards improving gender equality throughout the sector in recent decades, persistent gender gaps, many of which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, remain.

Under the ILO's Decent Work in Garment Supply Chains Asia project, funded by the Swedish international development agency (Sida), a Call for Submissions was put out to collect evidence of promising practices towards closing gender gaps in the garment sector in Asia. The four key areas of consideration included the issues of: (i) pay equity; (ii) workplace discrimination, violence and harassment; (iii) unpaid care work and family responsibilities, maternity protection and paternity leave; and (iv) women's voice, representation and leadership.

The purpose of this brief is to highlight findings from the received submissions, and to increase knowledge of and showcase insights on industry relevant policies, programmes and initiatives that have been successful in closing critical gender gaps. In doing so, this brief seeks to contribute towards a shared knowledge base of "what works" in the garment sector and to identify key actions towards addressing gender gaps in the garment sector in Asia.