



International Women's Day

Better the balance, better the world



International
Labour
Organization



BetterWork

Better Work's contribution to a gender-balanced world

The global apparel sector provides manufacturing jobs to tens of millions of workers around the world. At least 75 per cent of these workers are women, but they are not equally represented in positions of power in the workplace.

Better Work is dedicated to shifting this balance. Our experience shows that taking steps towards equality in the sector is also a powerful driving force for enhancing working conditions, achieving better results for business and improving lives.

1. Better balance, improved working conditions

Our data shows that elevating the voice of workers can make workplaces more efficient, reduce the risk of unrest and improve conditions of work. Good communication can mean problems are resolved more quickly and introduce fresh thinking to the workplace.

Independent research demonstrates that factories with well-functioning worker-manager committees, such as those facilitated by Better Work, have better workplace conditions but only if certain principles are followed. These principles include worker representatives being freely elected and, crucially, for women workers to be fairly represented on these committees in proportion to the overall factory workforce.

Improvements observed included a reduced likelihood

of incidents of sexual harassment, a better ambience at work, and more collaborative problem-solving environments.

Better Work data has also shown that participation in the programme leads to higher compliance on working hours and pay regulations. The resulting effect is one of reducing the gender pay gap and the imbalance of working hours between men and women that is frequently observed in garment factories.

2. Better balance, more productive businesses

Similarly, business is more productive with a better gender balance. Supervisors in garment factories are often promoted to their positions without receiving training on how to successfully manage a workforce. Moreover, there is often an imbalance between women – who make up a large majority of sewing operators – and men – who are more likely to have supervisory or management roles in the workplace.

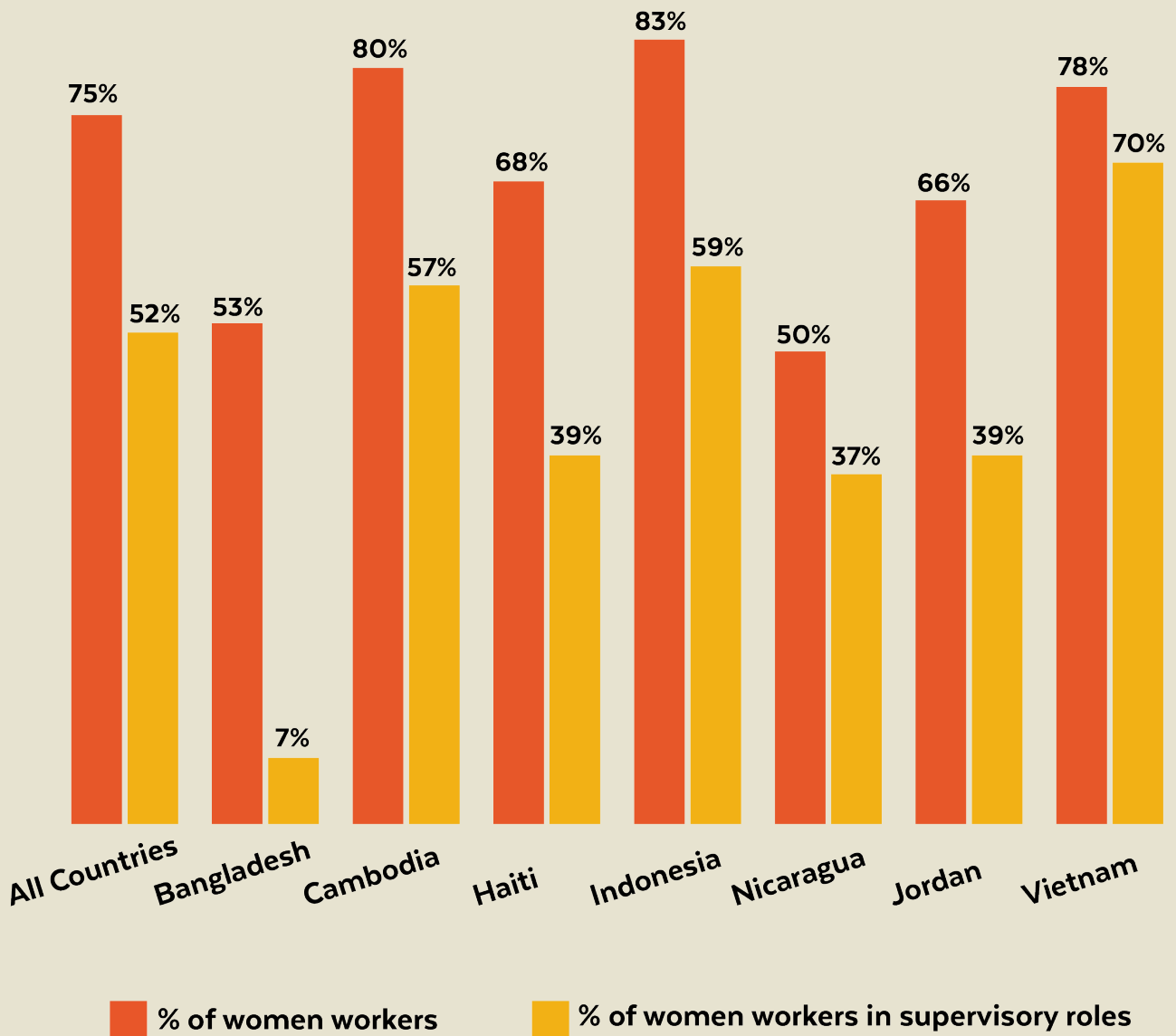
Better Work's specialized training on supervisory skills addresses this imbalance by targeting the empowerment and promotion of women to supervisory roles. The programme's training has been shown to lower staff turnover and injury rates, and to increase line productivity by up to 22 per cent. The

positive effects are most pronounced among female trainees who had, according to survey data, formerly perceived themselves as relatively powerless in the workplace.

These results show that businesses potentially make considerable productivity gains from investing in the skills of their women workers. In the last five years, Better Work has trained a total of almost 11,000 line supervisors in garment factories across the world, of which 54 per cent were female supervisors.

Clearly, for business, focusing on gender balance is not just the right thing to do – it is essential for achieving better working conditions and firm performance.

SUPERVISOR/WORKER GENDER BREAKDOWN ACROSS COUNTRIES¹



3. Better balance, better lives

Better Work has shown that balancing power relations in garment factories can have positive spillovers in women's lives outside the workplace.

Through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, researchers have documented how training on topics such as workplace cooperation, financial literacy, and even occupational safety and health have empowered women with skills relevant for their home life. Both women and men trainees in Better Work

factories have reported they have translated lessons from factory training to communication at home regarding financial and healthcare decisions, leading to a fairer distribution of household chores and a more balanced family life .

¹ Measured as the average share of female workers reported during the latest assessment visits (1,514 factories in total).

4. Our strategy for better balance

With the launch of our Global Gender Strategy in January 2018, Better Work has created an ambitious plan to advance gender equality and promote women's economic empowerment in the global garment industry. By the end of 2022, Better Work seeks to have promoted concrete and lasting change

in global garment supply chains, both at the factory level and, through influencing and strengthening policies, institutions and practices, at the national, regional and global levels.

THE STRATEGY IS STRUCTURED AROUND FOUR THEMES



Discrimination

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



Paid work and care

Upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights (including pregnancy related healthcare and nutrition), and supporting access to maternity protection, breastfeeding and childcare opportunities;



Women's voice and representation

Promoting the representation of women workers in social dialogue processes, including workplace cooperation committees (such as Better Work's worker – management committees) and trade unions, union federations, and employer organizations, and boosting their voice in collective bargaining processes;



Leadership and skill development

Promoting career opportunities for women in factories (e.g. line supervisors and management positions), leadership positions in governments, trade unions and employers organizations, and supporting financial literacy and household budget planning.



5. Better Work. Better Balance. Better World.

Better Work's vision is for a society where women and men have equal and decent work opportunities free from gender-based violence and discrimination and are able to access their rights, fulfil their potential and decide on their futures.

Better Work has a proven track record of mobilizing global brands, governments, factory owners and workers to improve factory working conditions and increase firm competitiveness. We change attitudes and behaviour through our advisory services, training, compliance assessments and research.

Using this expertise, working with partners and building upon our understanding of the positive impact gender equality has in the workplace, on businesses and in the community, Better Work is committed to achieving a better balance for a better world.

THE BETTER WORK GLOBAL PROGRAMME IS SUPPORTED BY PARTICIPATING BRANDS AND FACTORIES, AND THE FOLLOWING KEY DONOR PARTNERS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER):

Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT)

Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Danida)

Germany (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ)

Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MFA)

Switzerland (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, SECO)

United States (US Department of Labor, USDOL)



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