

Newsletter

International Labour Organization
End of Year 2022 | Highlights and insights

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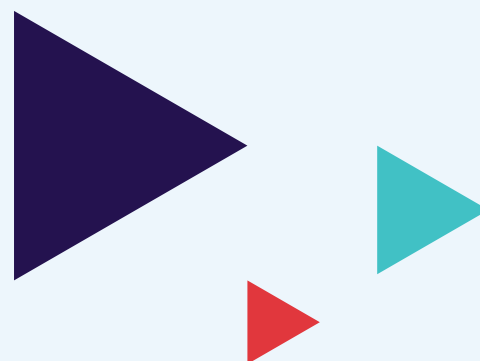
14th Multi-Stakeholders' Forum explores means to continue the advancement of decent work and ensure sustainability in Jordan's garment industry

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"Workers Got Talent" competition employs innovative approaches to raise awareness of mental health while at the same time celebrating creative talents of garment workers





Dear Friends,

Under Phase IV Strategy (2022 - 2027) of Better Work Jordan, the programme is now focused on equipping national partners to maintain and advance achievements made in the garment industry over the past 15 years, aspiring to a long-lasting impact on working conditions.

With that instrumental approach in mind, the programme joined hands with the Jordanian Garment and Textiles Exporters' Association (JGATE) to organise the key 14th Multi-Stakeholders' Forum.

Sustainable growth and improvements, as well as strengthening workers' voices, social dialogue, and collaboration among stakeholders and partners took centre stage at the forum. Participants echoed concerns by some Jordanian civil society organisations and trade unions about a decision by the government to abolish the Ministry of Labour.

Addressing the forum, visiting US Department of Labor Deputy Undersecretary for International Labor Affairs, Thea Lee, called for safeguarding decent work improvements in the garment sector, including through greater inclusion of women and empowering workers. Her trip to Jordan was the first by a senior department official since the 2001 enactment of the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement.

The visit constituted a significant opportunity to showcase achievements of the programme, while exploring and acknowledging challenges in the industry. "Better Work Jordan has played a key role in nurturing a high level of cooperation and trust in the sector," Lee told the forum.

Ensuing the sustainability of these gains and meeting current and future challenges require that national tripartite constituents work hand in hand, enhancing joint efforts and collaboration, and building mutual trust.

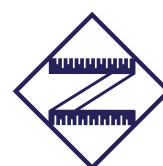
All stakeholders and partners need to shoulder their responsibilities and carry out their duties to realise our shared vision of a competitive Jordanian garment industry that advances national socioeconomic development, lifts people out of poverty and upholds the fundamental rights of all workers.

Better Work Jordan will continue to support the national tripartite constituents in their efforts to protect workers, empower women, create an enabling healthy environment, increase industry contribution to Jordanian employment, and promote investment and inclusive economic growth.

The Better Work Jordan team



95
Factories



100
Assessment
reports



68,455
Workers in
registered
factories



462
Advisory
visits



1,771
Training
participants



21
International
buyers

► 49th Meeting of Project Advisory Committee

The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) of Better Work Jordan met to discuss means to advance decent work in the country's garment industry in line with preliminary findings of four studies recently conducted and published on the sector.

Its 49th meeting examined studies on [access to childcare services](#) for Jordanian and Syrian workers at Al Hassan Industrial Estate; [healthcare services](#) for garment workers; situation of garment [workers with disabilities](#); and [working hours and wages](#).

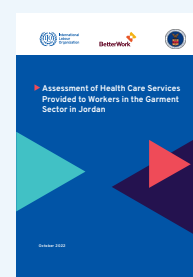
Childcare

The study assessed and identified worker needs in terms of preferred options in accessing childcare services; challenges in accessing different options to childcare services stipulated in existing legislation; and recommendations for best options to access these services. It collected data from 524 Jordanian (355) and Syrian (169) workers, the majority of whom are women (72 - 70 per cent). According to the findings, cost was the main challenge facing accessibility to a preferred childcare service, followed by its locations. The study reported that 69 per cent of respondents agreed that childcare services affect workers' decisions of joining a factory; 46 per cent believe nurseries have positive impact on a child's personality; and 52 per cent thought of quitting work due to childcare responsibilities.



Healthcare

Assessing healthcare services, including first aid and occupational safety and health systems, provided for garment workers at 13 of the 91 factories registered with Better Work Jordan, the study identified worker needs, health services at clinics, and legal gaps. The study found issues with these services and medical supplies, as well as cleanliness and hygiene standards. It revealed significant issues with worker sick leave entitlements. While workers are aware of their sick leave rights, some factory medical staff and external physicians were instructed not to give sick leave to workers. The study reported cases of rejecting sick leave letters from external doctors.



Workers with disabilities

A separate study looked into the situation of workers with disabilities at nine factories and three satellite units in the garment sector. It aimed to identify barriers and obstacles facing these workers when searching for and accessing work, and when working in garment factories, across physical, cultural, and social dimensions. According to the findings, challenges faced by garment workers with disabilities include social and cultural discrimination, wage gaps, and lack of reasonable accommodation and empowerment at work. Despite these issues, one factory has started to proactively adapt its facilities to better meet the needs of workers with disabilities, according to the study. The process reportedly began with the installation of several bathrooms adapted for access and use by workers with disabilities. In addition, information is displayed on a large screen at the factory, and sign language interpreters are occasionally available. Most of the workers reported feeling "comfortable" in their job, while being productive. "The impact of these steps has been overwhelmingly positive and has greatly contributed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in this factory," the study said. The researchers identified interventions to address challenges, as well as stakeholders with the capacity to implement these interventions. Recommendations included redesigning work environments in ways that facilitate the work, movement, and integration of workers with disabilities; and planning and implementing broad awareness-raising and educational campaigns aimed at dispelling negative stereotypes and misguided attitudes towards workers with disabilities.



Working hours and wages

This study showed that migrants work substantial overtime -- average of 59 hours a week, compared to 42 hours per week performed by Jordanian workers. There are no limits on the amount of overtime that can be worked under Jordanian law, but the long working hours put high physical and psychological pressure on workers, and impact their productivity. The study found that setting a cap on overtime hours would affect migrant workers, but not Jordanians, and that migrant workers' pay is closely tied to the number of overtime hours they work.



► Towards Decent Work and a Growing, Sustainable Tomorrow

Convening with in-person attendance after two years of online participation due to COVID-19 restrictions, the 14th Multi-Stakeholders' Forum explored means to continue the advancement of decent work and ensure sustainability in Jordan's garment industry, building on its substantive growth over the past 15 years.

Organised by Better Work Jordan, in collaboration with the Jordanian Garment and Textiles Exporters' Association and of Garments (JGATE), the forum discussed efforts to strengthen workers' voices, social dialogue, and collaboration among stakeholders and partners.



Representatives of Jordanian and US governments, employers, workers, and international buyers, and civil society organisations, looked into ways to tackle challenges in the sector, and how the industry can contribute to economic modernisation efforts through equipping Jordanians with the necessary skills for middle management positions at factories and by attracting more investments.

The garment sector employs nearly 66,000 workers, the majority of whom are women and migrants from South-Asia. The Jordanian share of the labour force in the industry is around 24-25 per cent – which stakeholders and partners are collaborating to increase.

Themed, “Towards Decent Work and a Growing, Sustainable Tomorrow”, the forum held two panel discussions; the first was on “decent working conditions: equality, inclusion and voice”, and the second on “strategic potential and priorities of the garment sector”.

“The government is keen on creating better working conditions in the garment sector, and seeks further improvements, including in decent work, pay equity, protecting rights of workers of various nationalities, workers' ability to join unions, and decent housing accommodation,”

MoL Secretary General, Farouq Al Hadidi, said at the forum.

Thea Lee, US Department of Labor Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs, who headed a delegation to Jordan and participated in the forum, said growth in the US-Jordan trade “is built off the reputation that Jordan has garnered as a good actor committed to ensuring fair competition in the global market that benefits both business and worker.”

Trade between the two countries has increased over 800 per cent, as Jordan's exports to the US are now more than 26 times higher than before the free trade agreement, according to Lee.

The garment industry has seen significant growth, driven by large factories exporting to the US market under the US-Jordan Free Trade Agreement (USJFTA) that was signed in 2000 and went into full effect in 2010.

► Senior US Department of Labor official discusses worker rights in Jordan

US Department of Labor Deputy Undersecretary of Labor for International Affairs, Thea Lee, visited Jordan for two days, during which she met with government officials, labour union and business leaders, and Better Work Jordan/ILO representatives.



During the first visit to Jordan by a senior US Department of Labor official in more than two decades, Lee and her delegation held discussions on advancing workers' rights and empowering women, to foster decent work standards and sustainable livelihoods.

She and other department officials visited garment factories, where management spoke about challenges and successes, underlining Better Work Jordan role and efforts, including advisory and training services.

"Jordan's commitment in the last decades to transparently combat harassment and forced labour, and promote greater worker representation creates a strong basis for future progress,"
said US Department of Labor Deputy Undersecretary of Labor for International Affairs, Thea Lee.

Addressing the opening of the [14th Multi-Stakeholders' Forum](#), Lee called for safeguarding the improvements in decent working conditions, including through empowering workers.

"We look forward to maintaining positive momentum so that workers in both countries, through independent and democratic unions, can collectively bargain for decent jobs and good working conditions," a US Department of Labor [statement](#) quoted Lee as saying.

The trip highlighted the importance of transparency and respect for worker rights in the garment sector and beyond. Officials discussed the clear connection between protecting workers' rights and attracting foreign investment and creating good jobs.

While in Jordan, Lee joined officials from the Office of the US Trade Representative to convene the Labor Subcommittee of the USJFTA to review the implementation of labour provisions in the agreement. The committee heard directly from workers and employers in Jordan's industrial zones that make garments destined for US markets.



► Promoting rights and wellbeing of workers with disabilities

Better Work Jordan aims to ensure that garment workers with disabilities are integrated into the workforce and decision-making, in a healthy work environment that advances their rights and improves their wellbeing.

Marking International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the programme sheds light on real inspiring stories of workers with disabilities overcoming the odds.

Determination and self-empowerment: The story of Amneh

My name is Amneh and I am 49. I was born in Madaba Governorate, with only two fingers on each hand.

My father died when I was three. My family worked in farming, and my mother sewed us clothes. She and I now live together at home after all my brothers and sisters got married.

I was determined to complete my high school education, but experienced difficulties in some school subjects, and decided to quit studying.

My mother encouraged me to learn to sew, but I was very hesitant. It did not occur to me that I can hold a pair of scissors. The idea made me nervous and worried, but my mother continued to support me. She told me to hold the scissors in any way I could and to keep trying. I eventually joined a sewing course at a charitable organization, and, after two years, I graduated at the top of my class.

Then, I applied to a small sewing business in Amman. The owner was disinclined to hire me because of my hands, but my mother convinced him to give me a chance. When the man saw my sewing skills and work, he hired me as a sewer. I was dedicated and committed to professionally completing tasks on time. I gained work experience, and, after that, I applied to a garment factory at an industrial zone in Sahab. I passed the probation period, and my supervisors liked my work, skills and quick learning ability. I succeeded in using all types of sewing machines at the factory. After 5 years, I was promoted and started to train workers.



Amneh, pictured at her workstation, trains newcomers on using various types of sewing machines at the factory (©Better Work Jordan).

"I am not worried about holding scissors anymore. I am a skilled sewer who handles scissors professionally and effortlessly. I aspire to start my own sewing business ... It is difficult and I have a long journey ahead, but I am determined to make my dream come true."

I train new Jordanian workers on using various types of sewing machines at the factory. Some workers learn fast, while others need extra time and effort. I am joyful and determined. I am also stubborn, but only when it comes to ensuring my work is diligently done.

I cooperate with all workers. We encourage each other, which makes our work environment healthy. That is crucial for all workplaces.



Amneh enjoys using coloured sand to fill glass bottles with creative patterns (©Better Work Jordan).

Despite my busy schedule, I still find time to enjoy my hobbies. I use coloured sand to fill glass bottles or containers with creative patterns, and I make cloth dolls. I even showcase my products at shops and tourist facilities.

I am not worried about holding scissors anymore. I am a skilled sewer who handles scissors professionally and effortlessly. I aspire to start my own sewing business, and have already started to work on that, saving from my monthly salary. It is difficult and I have a long journey ahead, but I am determined to make my dream come true.

Strengthening Workers' Voices

The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries (JTGCU) has recently entered into a new and updated collective bargaining agreement (CBA), with the Jordanian Garment, Accessories and Textiles Exporters' Association and of Garments (JGATE) and Association of Owners of Factories, Workshops and Garments (AOFWG). The CBA came into effect on 01/11/2022, and remains valid for three years, until 31/10/2025.

This special supplement offers more details about the CBA and how Better Work Jordan partners with the union to protect workers' rights and promote decent work in the garment sector.



The Mental Health Project

Through the “Workers Got Talent” competition, the project aimed to raise awareness about the importance of creative outlets for improving workers' mental health in their work environment as well as creating a space for expressing their views on mental health.

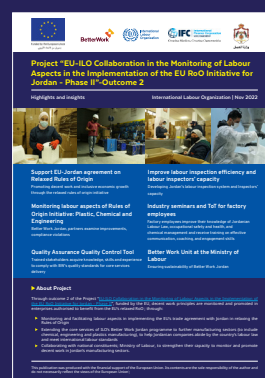
Find out more information in this special supplement about the competition as well as Better Work Jordan efforts to help improve mental health of workers in the garment sector, especially women and migrants, who form the majority of the workforce and face many physical and psychological stressors.



Supporting EU-Jordan agreement on Relaxed Rules of Origin

Better Work Jordan, through the EU-ILO partnership, presented findings of a pilot assessment report of non-garment factories at a meeting with representatives of these factories, MoL, petrochemical trade union, Jordan Chamber of Industry (JCI). It revealed an average non-compliance rate of 41 per cent in the first year of participation in the programme, despite signs of improvement in these enterprises. Carried out in collaboration with the MoL and the EU, the first synthesis report on the assessment covered three factories in the plastics sector, one in the chemicals sector, and one in the engineering sector.

Information and details about Better Work Jordan services for non-garment factories and the project, “EU-ILO Collaboration in the Monitoring of Labour Aspects in the Implementation of the EU RoO Initiative for Jordan - Phase II”, are available in this special supplement.



Better Work Jordan is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The ILO flagship programme brings together stakeholders from all levels of the global garment manufacturing industry to improve working conditions, enhance respect for labour rights, and boost competitiveness. Better Work Jordan began operations at the request of the governments of Jordan and the United States over ten years ago. Better Work country programmes regularly prepare public reports synthesising industry updates and highlighting non-compliance findings and trends in order to increase transparency and to communicate observations to a wider audience. For more information and updates, visit the website of [Better Work Jordan](#).

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