

## Case Study 5.3

# Challenging sexual harassment in the textile sector through international support (Better Work)

This case study is an example of how a partnership between international organizations has provided training to reduce sexual harassment, as part of a wider initiative to assist competitiveness and economic development in countries where there are significant numbers of workers employed in new global supply chain industries. The case study highlights the productivity and competitive advantages of preventing and addressing sexual harassment.

Better Work is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). It brings together the expertise of the ILO in labour standards with that of the IFC in private sector development. The Better Work programme has improved workers' rights and factory compliance with labour laws in seven countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

The programme provides advisory and training services to various stakeholders to address compliance with labour standards, including sexual harassment. It also works closely with international buyers and national tripartite (government, employers and unions) partners to promote the scaling-up of experiences to the national level.

### ***Better Work Jordan***

Better Work Jordan was one of the first Better Work programmes set up in 2008. Following the financial crisis, in 2011 the government decided to mandate participation in Better Work Jordan for all garment-sector factories, to demonstrate commitment to compliance and attract investment. Training of workers and factory staff is a key component in Better Work's strategy to improve working conditions for garment workers and increase business performance in factories.

### ***Preventing and combating sexual harassment in Jordan's garment industry through training and awareness-raising***

Serious allegations of sexual abuse have been made across Jordan's apparel industry so Better Work Jordan (BWJ) established a task force to develop tools and materials to prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace, including a template factory toolkit consisting of a model policy on harassment, an awareness-raising poster, a training brochure and a quick reference 'dos and don'ts' to display on the factory floor, together with a training module for managers, supervisors and workers.

For example, sexual harassment prevention training was carried out with the Jerash Garment & Fashion Manufacturing Co. Ltd. Training gave participants practical guidance on how to prevent and deal with sexual harassment, including sexual harassment policies, sensitizing managers and workers on what constitutes sexual harassment, and deepening managers' and supervisors' understanding of how sexual harassment affects workers and the workplace. The training defines sexual harassment, identifies its forms, causes and impacts while also providing ways to prevent and resolve it.

**Workers:** The training gave workers an understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment in the workplace, highlighting the different forms of harassment such as physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, and the impact that it has on workers.



“We are foreigners in Jordan, so we do not know much about the laws, rules and procedures, but I now have a better idea of how to deal with the situation if something happens,” said factory worker Priyadorshani, Jerash Garment & Fashion Manufacturing Co. Ltd

“We didn’t know before the training how to report sexual harassment or what it means, its different forms. I will tell my friends what I learnt in the course. It is important for everyone to know what to do if they are sexually harassed,” said Sriyani Wikramaarachchi, Sterling Apparel Manufacturing L.L.C

**Managers and supervisors:** The training gave supervisors a clear understanding of their responsibilities to address sexual harassment, how to deal with allegations of sexual harassment and provided tools for managers and supervisors on how to protect their workers from sexual harassment and avoid inappropriate behaviour themselves. The training also provided information on ways to address sexual harassment, including information on how to conduct interviews, impartial investigation techniques and confidentiality issues.

“The awareness that was created, especially for the middle management and on the supervisors’ level, is one of the biggest successes of the training. BWJ played a great role in training our workers and our middle management in particular. We will ask BWJ to do follow-up sessions because people tend to forget. And it is good to have updates on the subject. We welcome any posters or other tools that could further assist us,” said Farhan Ifram, General Manager of Sterling Apparel Manufacturing L.L.C.

**Unions:** “We try to raise awareness on the issues among female workers in factories but there are many challenges, such as cultural barriers and language barriers. And sometimes factories try to internally solve these problems before we can find out about them. So there are a number of issues which hinder our efforts to raise awareness on sexual harassment but it is definitely a high priority for us and we need more support from organizations like Better Work Jordan to conduct more awareness-raising programmes in a diversity of factories,” said Mervat Abed Al Kareem Al Jamhawi, a member of the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing.

Following training by Better Work and the ILO, employers’ associations and the trade union signed a groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement covering the full garment sector. It includes provisions on regulating working hours, wages and bonuses, improving health and a commitment to treat all workers equally.

The training carried out in garment factories in Jordan has uncovered a number of challenges:

- Fear of speaking out: many workers fear the consequences of openly discussing sexual harassment.
- Cultural differences and ingrained social attitudes: workers of both sexes often believe women are only sexually harassed if they signal they are sexually available, whether through their behaviour or physical appearance.
- Time constraints: workers are only permitted to spend a limited time in the training sessions before they are called back to the production line to fulfill their production quota. This often denies workers the time needed to feel comfortable in openly discussing sexual harassment.
- Factory adherence: the key messages of the sexual harassment prevention training need to be put into practice, with the aim of creating a working environment with zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

**Sources:** Better Work (2015); Brown et al., (2014)