



# BetterWork

## Better Work Jordan: Worker and Manager Survey Results

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BRIEF

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International  
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## Introduction

Over the course of a month from mid-December 2019 to mid-January 2020, Better Work Jordan collected survey responses from a representative sample of nearly 1,700 workers in Better Work Jordan participating factories on issues related to working conditions, stakeholder awareness, and personal life. At the same time, the program captured the opinions of managers from 71 of the total of 81 participating factories. This data collection represented the second round in an ongoing data collection effort from June 2019 and builds on past impact assessment research.

This policy brief highlights some of the data and insights gathered from workers and managers and builds on the information presented in the Worker Voice Survey Results policy brief from November 2019.<sup>1</sup> The main focus of the policy brief remains the same: understanding the role and engagement of national stakeholders in the garment industry from the perspective of workers. In particular, this brief focuses on the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and the single trade union for the sector, the General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment and Clothing Industries and their representatives at the factory level. The second round of data collection allows us to go deeper on this topic as some new questions were added and because it includes insights from managers which were incomplete in the previous round. Additional insights gathered from the survey data can be found in Better Work Jordan's Annual Report 2020, where they provide context for some of the key compliance data gathered from assessments in the last year.<sup>2</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting government public-health response have significantly changed the current state of the garment industry in Jordan, and will continue to shape the global garment industry in ways that are not currently known. The data gathered in these worker and manager interviews comes from before the crisis touched the lives of people in Jordan. While this means that some of the responses have certainly changed since the data was gathered in December, it is still good to analyse and note key issues in the sector as these fundamental aspects of

the sector will only be exacerbated by Covid-19. In addition, the two rounds of data collection in 2019 will provide an important baseline for the data we will collect in the future as workers and managers are effected by the pandemic.

## Findings

This brief focuses on worker and manager opinions about key factory working conditions and explores the channels that workers take to respond to those issues, both within the factory through the worker-manager bipartite committee and through engagement with key stakeholders outside of the factory including the union and the MoL. The survey data collected in this round of data collection is broadly similar to the first round of data collection conducted in June 2019 – when there are substantial differences, potential explanations are explored.

Key findings include:

- Workers are much more comfortable going to people inside the factory for help than to outside stakeholders.
- Significant fractions of workers have concerns with verbal abuse, workplace safety, and pay (particularly low wages).
- The trade union has more visibility in factory than the MoL. Despite this, workers do not list the trade union as an entity that they feel comfortable consulting, or one that they would turn to with any of the specific workplace concerns listed.
- There are significant differences between groups of workers, particularly between different nationalities and between migrant workers and Jordanians. Migrant workers are more aware of the trade union and the CBA than local workers.

### Workers' Perspectives on Grievance Mechanisms

Overall, workers state that they are satisfied with the grievance mechanisms in the factory, with 79 per cent expressing satisfaction with the mechanisms available in their factory. This mirrors the sentiment expressed by workers in the previous survey round. However, digging deeper on ways that workers voice

<sup>1</sup> Better Work Jordan. November 2019. Worker Voice Survey Results. Policy Brief. <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BWJ-Worker-Voice-Survey-Results-4-002.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Better Work Jordan. April 2020. Annual Synthesis Report 2020: An industry and compliance review, reporting period January–December 2019. <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BWJ-Annual-Report-2020-Final.pdf>

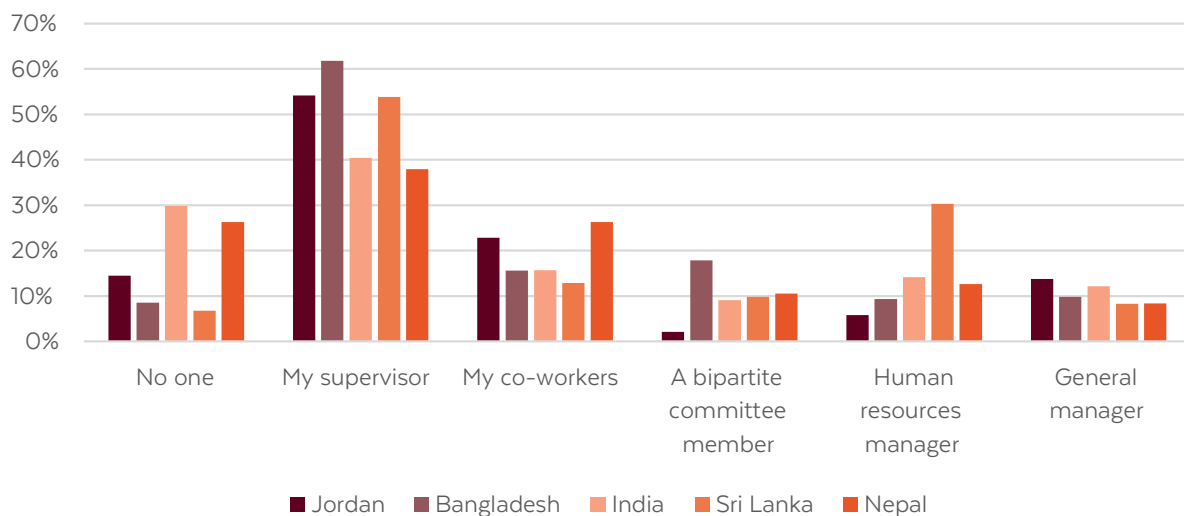
their grievances provides nuance to this finding.

For instance, when asked specifically about who they would feel comfortable going to if they had a problem in the workplace, 14 per cent of people said that would not feel comfortable going to anyone. Outside of this group, most workers were comfortable approaching somebody within the factory management. Primarily, this was their direct supervisor (55 per cent) but General Manager (12 percent) and Human Resource manager (11 per cent) were also common responses. Roughly 18 per cent of workers said that they would feel comfortable going to their co-workers and 11 per cent said they would be comfortable going to the worker-manager bipartite committee. At the very bottom of this list are the union and the Ministry of Labour, with 3 and 1 percent of workers saying they would be comfortable going to these entities respectively. While many workplace issues can and should be managed and

adjudicated within the factory, the fact that workers are not comfortable seeking assistance from two of the major stakeholders representing the government and workers shows that there may be gaps in handling grievances, especially when the issues are more difficult. These results are broadly similar to the results from earlier surveys.

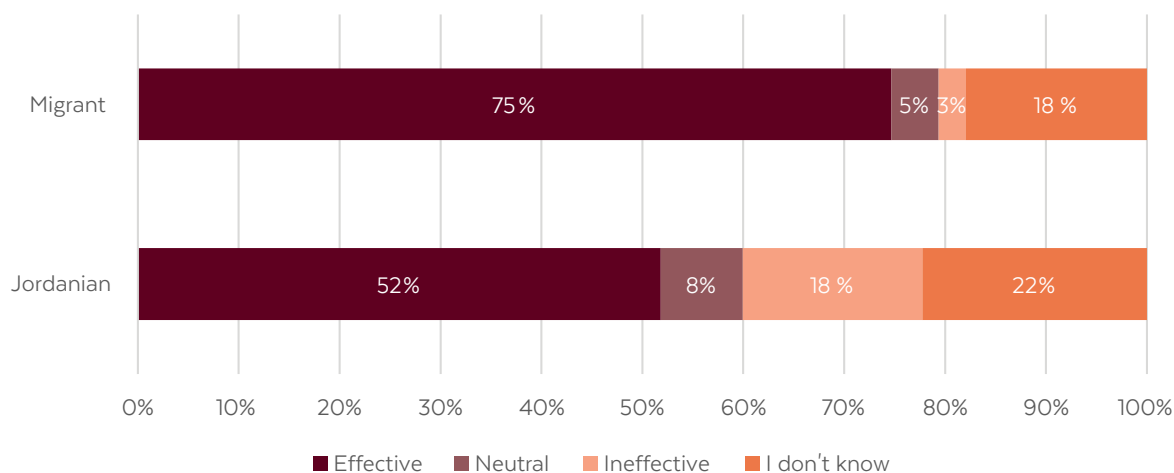
Three-fourths of the workforce of the Jordanian apparel industry are international migrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Nepal. Survey results show there is significant variation in comfort level with different actors among groups of workers based on nationality. Indian and Nepali workers are the least comfortable seeking assistance with concerns. Sri Lankan workers are unique among workers in how comfortable they are going to HR managers which may be reflective of their greater familiarity with Human Resources as these are integral to most businesses in Sri Lanka.

**Figure 1: Who do you feel comfortable going to with a concern?**



While workers may not be comfortable going to the worker-manager bipartite committee themselves, the majority of workers do think that the committee would be effective if there was a conflict between managers and workers. Migrant workers have a more favourable impression than Jordanian workers on the effectiveness of the committee. Despite these

positive reactions, it is worthwhile to note that roughly a fifth of workers say that they do not know if the committee would be effective or not. This may be because the factory does not have a committee, because of lack of awareness of the committee, or because the committee has not had to mediate major conflicts between workers and managers.

**Figure 2: Effectiveness of bipartite committee**

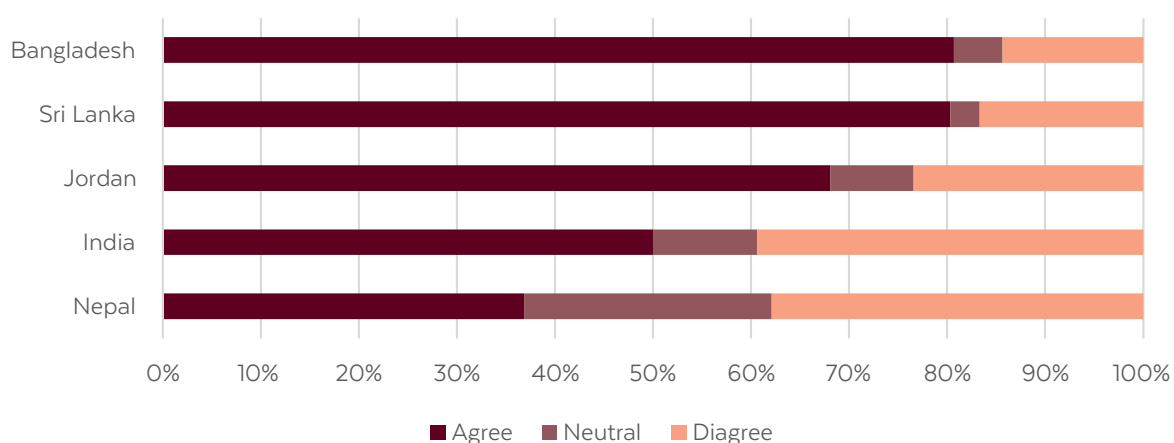
Managers had a more favourable opinion of the committee than workers, with all but one manager saying that the committee would be effective in mediating a conflict. However, in some cases managers said that no such committee existed in their factory or that they were not aware if it existed or not.

### Trust between workers and managers

Mutual trust between workers and managers is a key component of factory success that Better Work engages with in the spirit of successful dialogue and tripartism. Trust between managers and workers needs to be earned and cultivated from both sides. According to the survey data, managers think that trust is significantly higher than workers do, with 94 per cent of managers agreeing with the statement that there is mutual trust while only 70 per cent of workers agree. While in isolation both of these

numbers are positive, the large gap in opinions between managers and workers on this topic shows that more work needs to be done in this area.

A deeper look at the responses from workers shows that there is significant variation in responses between groups of workers by nationality. Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan workers are most likely to think that there is mutual trust, Jordanian workers fall in the middle, and Indian and Nepalese workers are much less likely to think that there is mutual trust. This degree of variation is surprising given that the question asks about relationships overall in the factory between workers and managers—this highlights the point that workers of different nationalities have very different experiences in the factory. Indian and Nepali workers are both in the minority among workers in the factory, and they may be left out of dialogue between managers and the majority groups in the factory.

**Figure 3: There is mutual trust between workers and management in this factory**

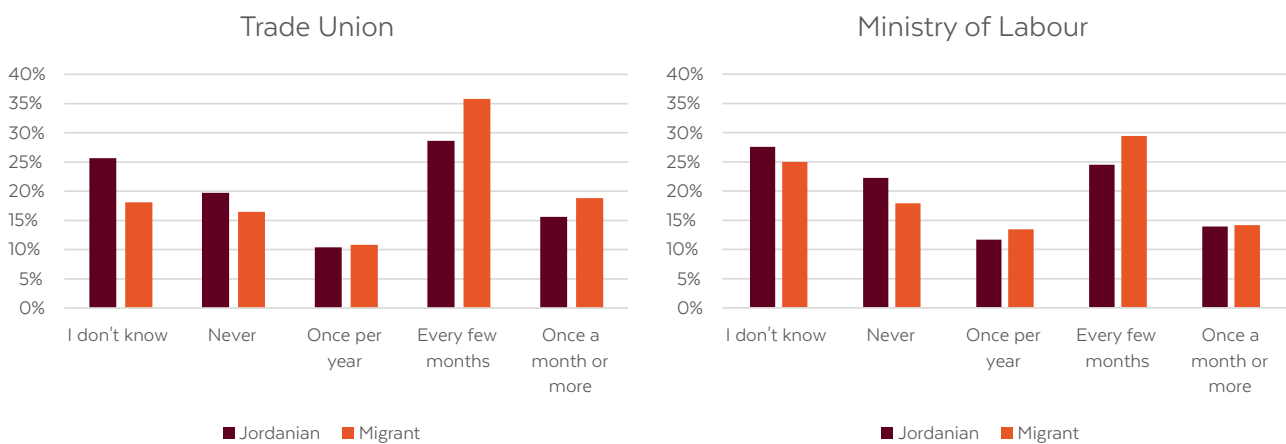
## Awareness of laws and support systems

The majority of workers report an awareness of key stakeholders, such as union representatives and labour inspectors from the Ministry of Labour, and of key laws and support systems including the sector-wide CBA and aspects of the Jordanian Labour Law governing work in garment factories.

Workers were asked how often they noticed representatives from the union or the Ministry of Labour visiting their factory. Generally, workers are

more familiar with the trade union than the Ministry of labour, and migrant workers are more aware of these representatives than Jordanian workers. The most frequent response was “every few months”, however a sizable portion of the sample reported that they did not know or had never seen a representative. Twenty-five per cent of Jordanian workers don’t know how often the union visits the factory, compared to 18 per cent of migrant workers. Among migrant workers, workers from India are far less likely to report seeing union or MoL representatives in the factory.

**Figure 4: How often have you seen representatives from the Trade Union and Ministry of Labour in your factory?**



The majority of workers indicated that they were aware of the sector-wide CBA and of basic elements of Jordanian Labour Law in results that are broadly similar to the previous round data collection in June 2019. Migrant workers are substantially more likely than Jordanian workers to report that they are aware of the sector-wide CBA. In contrast, Jordanian workers are more likely than migrant workers to say that they are aware of the labour law and how it affects their jobs and working conditions. Familiarity with the labour law has improved since the first round of data collection, from 54 to 61 per cent of workers reporting that they have sufficient knowledge. This improvement was driven by Bangladeshi workers who went from 50 per cent saying they had sufficient knowledge to 67 per cent. These improvements may be driven by the availability of the unified contract in workers’ native languages or from increased efforts by factory managers to educate their workers.

## Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken

Workers were asked about the concerns that they and their co-workers had on a wide range of issues, including with pay, working hours and verbal abuse.

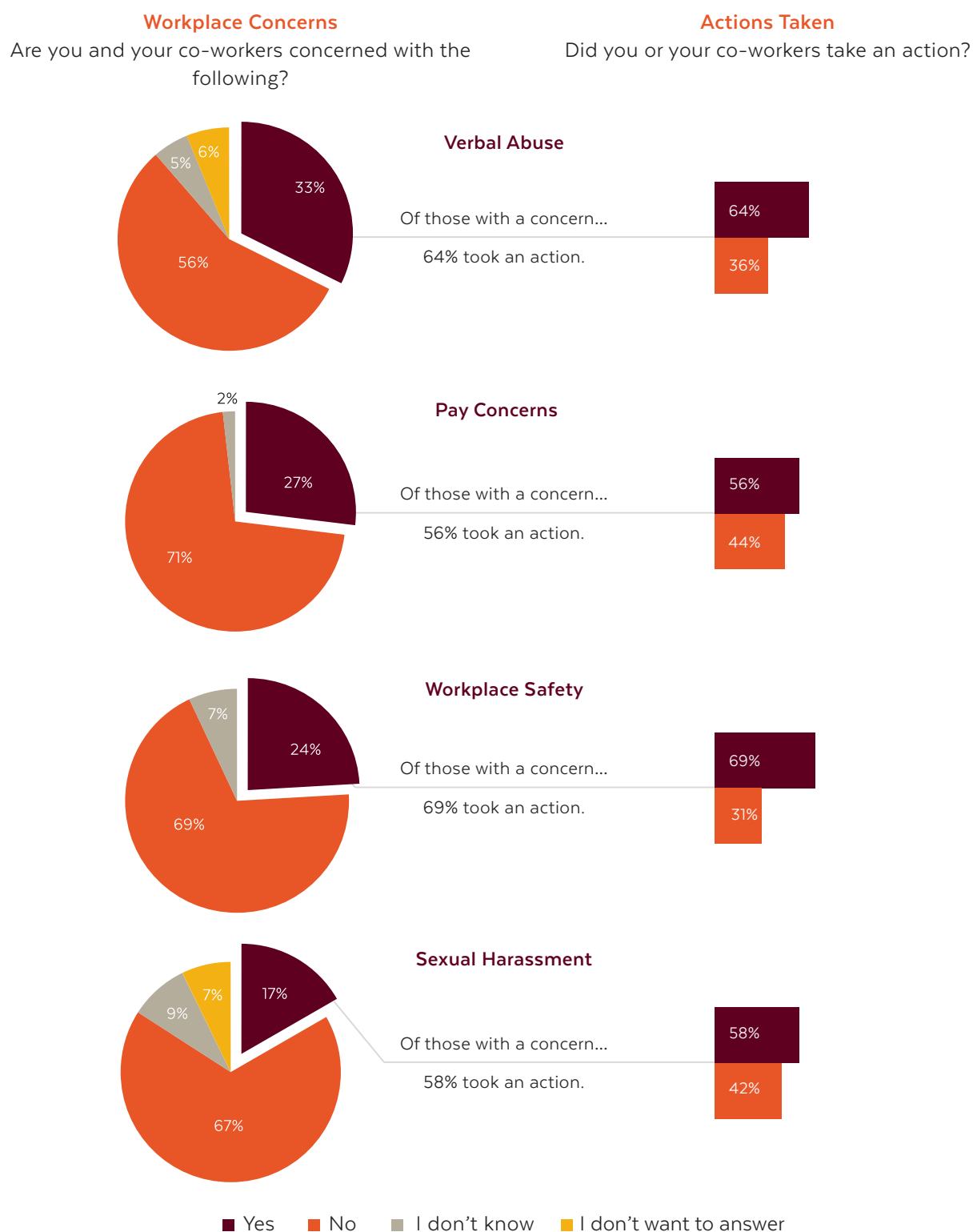
If they responded that they had a concern, they were then asked what actions, if any, they took in response to these concerns. Verbal abuse is the top concern among workers, with roughly a third of workers reporting that verbal abuse is a concern for them and their co-workers.

Broadly speaking, these results are similar to 2019’s previous survey round, with a few important differences. First of all, the percentage of workers reporting concerns has dropped since June. However, of those respondents reporting concerns, more said that they took an action in response to the concern. This may mean that workers have better means of expressing their concerns or have more agency in the factory. However, it may also mean that the concerns were more serious and that the workers felt that they had to take an action. On the majority of concerns, the proportion of people who said they discussed their concern with a bipartite committee member, a union representative, or someone from the MoL increased. However, in a sign that the concerns were not being addressed, the proportion who considered quitting their jobs increased for both verbal abuse and sexual harassment concerns.

There are also some interesting differences in responses between workers of different nationalities. For instance, Sri Lankan workers report very high rates of concern with workplace safety. Eighty-six percent of Sri Lankan workers reported that they were concerned with dangerous equipment, accidents or

the potential for injuries in their factory, compared to 18 per cent of workers from all other nationalities. One plausible explanation for this divergence could be that migrant workers from Sri Lanka had previous exposure to workplaces in their home country that had a relatively greater emphasis on workplace safety and awareness.

**Figure 5: Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken**





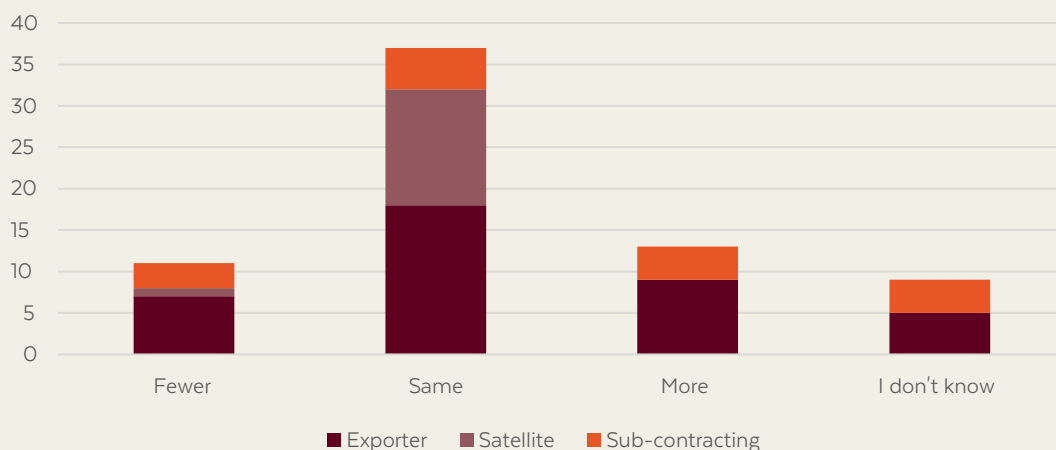
## IN FOCUS: FACTORY-BUYER RELATIONSHIPS

Better Work is also interested in the relationships between factories and their buyers. Responsible sourcing practices provide a positive cycle to maintain and improve compliance, while extractive sourcing practices can put a large burden on factories that they are likely to pass off to their workers. For instance, last-minute orders, late changes or confirmation of samples, cancellations, or changes to the payment schedule all place an extra and unforeseen burden on factories.

One aspect of factory-buyer relationships is that buyers may ask their suppliers to submit to a third-party audit to ensure that they are following the buyer's code of

conduct or other industry standard. Because most factories produce for multiple buyers, they may need to undergo several third-party audits every year, and these may have different requirements. One goal of the Better Work programme is to reduce the number of duplicate audits in factories (so resources can be directed to improvements) by assessing factories against national laws and international standards and enabling factories to share their Better Work assessment with multiple buyers. The majority of managers from BWJ participating factories say that they have between three and five third-party audits a year, while a quarter of managers say that they have six or more. Most managers report that this number is similar to last year, although roughly 20 per cent say that this number has increased.

**Figure 6: Change in third-party audits in the past year**



## Next Steps

The data collected from workers and managers has provided important information internally to the Better Work team, key takeaways have been communicated to stakeholders, and the data has been used by researchers to gather insights on the union's interactions with migrant workers and to assist in developing a sector strategy. More collaboration and analysis of this data is planned, especially in the areas of worker well-being, mental

health, and remittance spending patterns.

Better Work Jordan is currently preparing for the next round of data collection, initially scheduled for June 2020 and currently delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related government Defence Orders. This version of the survey will maintain consistency with previous survey questions, but will include an additional set of questions on the specific areas of workers' mental well-being and experiences of Covid-19 from the perspective of both workers and managers.



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