International Labour Organization

VISION ZERO FUND

COVID-19 AND OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

in the garment global supply chain in Myanmar

A CASE STUDY OF THE YANGON, BAGO, PATHEIN AND MANDALAY REGIONS

First published 2021

COVID-19 and occupational safety and health in the garment global supply chain in Myanmar: A case study of the Yangon, Bago, Pathein and Mandalay regions

International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2021

ISBN: 9789220362037 (print)

ISBN: 9789220362044 (web PDF)

COVID-19 AND OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

in the garment global supply chain in Myanmar

A CASE STUDY OF THE YANGON, BAGO, PATHEIN AND MANDALAY REGIONS

Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on workers and businesses in the garment sector in Myanmar. The industry employs a significant number of workers in the country, most of whom are women. Operations in garment factories in Myanmar have been severely affected by the pandemic with consequences for working conditions and the safety and health of workers. While many challenges have emerged from the pandemic, it has also brought attention to the importance of occupational safety and health and opportunities for improvement to ensure the safety and health of workers and business continuity. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Vision Zero fund project in Myanmar is providing support to stakeholders in the garment sector to strengthen implementation of measures to prevent exposure to COVID-19 in garment factories.

This research investigated occupational safety and health measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in garment factories in Myanmar. It was conducted from November 2020 to January 2021 before the military takeover and provides evidence on the importance of occupational safety and health preventive measures and identifies areas for occupational safety and health improvements in the continued fight against COVID-19. The research was conceptualized and coordinated as part of a global research project by Vision Zero Fund on occupational safety and health and COVID-19 in global supply chains, with technical guidance from Ana Catalina Ramirez (Occupational Safety and Health Specialist, LABADMIN/OSH).

I would like to thank Alizée Charbonneau (Programme and Operation Officer, LABADMIN/OSH), Mariana Infante Villarroel (Senior Technical Officer, ILO Vision Zero Fund Myanmar), and Carolyn Graham (Consultant, Caribbean Maritime University, Kingston, Jamaica) for coordinating this research and preparing this report with inputs and fieldwork from Bernardo Conti (consultant), Aye Myat Noe (consultant), and Htein Linn (National Project Coordinator, ILO Vision Zero Fund Myanmar). Gratitude is owed to thank the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar for their collaboration in conducting the research and all the stakeholders who participated in the research. Special thanks also go to Ockert Dupper (Programme Manager, Vision Zero Fund) for his support, Halshka Graczyk (Occupational Safety and Health Technical Specialist, LABADMIN/OSH) for the technical review of the report, and Anne Margaret Boyd (Project Manager, ILO-Yangon) and Mini Thakur (Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, LABADMIN/OSH) for their comments.

Donglin Li

Liaison Officer/Representative
ILO Liaison Office, Myanmar

Disclaimer

The authors are responsible for the content and the opinions expressed in this publication.
The content does not reflect the official position of the ILO. This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Acronyms

CMP	Cut-Make-Pack
CTUM	Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOB	Free On Board
IALI	International Association of Labour Inspectors
ILO	International Labour Organization
LIFT	The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund
MGMA	Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association
MOHS	Ministry of Health and Sports
MOLIP	Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population
OBM	Original Brand Manufacturing
ODM	Original Design Manufacturing
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
SSB	Social Security Board
UMFCCI	Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

This International Labour Organization (ILO) case study was conducted as part of the Vision Zero Fund programme and its project in Myanmar. The research investigated occupational safety and health (OSH) measures implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in garment factories in Myanmar. The case study was conducted from November 2020 to January 2021 and focused on the Yangon, Bago, Pathein and Mandalay regions.

In Myanmar, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted demand and supply in the garment global supply chain, with implications for OSH. The Myanmar garment sector accounted for almost 30 per cent of Myanmar's total exports in 2019 and employed more than 440,000 people, 90 per cent of them women, according to the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (MGMA). The MGMA had 720 factory members in 2020, with around 90 per cent of the factories export oriented. A total of 114 garment-producing factories were permanently or temporarily closed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of COVID-19 prevention, OSH measures were implemented in the garment global supply chain to comply with government regulations, ensure continuity in production and protect workers' safety and health. However, reduced orders and international demand and global supply chain disruptions heavily impacted the garment sector in Myanmar.

Workers across the garment global supply chain were severely affected. The pandemic led to factory closures, layoffs, reduced working hours and increased costs to counter the effects of the pandemic, such as the cost of personal protective equipment (PPE) and workers' transportation fees.

The Government of Myanmar released guidelines for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in workplaces on 19 March 2020. The provisions were further updated and expanded with a collection of publications, guidelines and instructions. Factories had to close down twice: first in April 2020 and then in September and October 2020. A number of factories underwent mandatory inspections and were subsequently allowed to reopen.

Importantly, the research identified short comings that highlight opportunities for improvement in OSH management in factories and in the national OSH system. The short comings included gaps in coordination between institutions responsible for monitoring compliance with safety and health measures in workplaces, and inadequate resources for labour inspectors. The need to improve communication and information-sharing about government requirements and the inspections required for factories to remain open was a further finding.

Over time, some of these challenges were addressed. Factories were found to be better prepared and informed during the second lockdown than they were for the first. Additionally, the Government and other bodies, such as the Hlaing Htar Yar Industrial Zone Committee, developed procedures to improve communication with the factories.

Factories implemented measures to prevent the spread of the virus in workplaces following the publication of government directives. These measures included temperature checks, physical distancing and the installation of handwashing stations. However, according to the participants who were interviewed for this case study, challenges arose in particular with ensuring physical distancing, especially in transport vehicles.

Moreover, it appeared that while measures were developed for specific categories of workers who we repart of high-risk groups (that is, at a higher risk of developing serious illness from COVID-19), such as older workers and those with pre-existing health conditions, these were not implemented in all workplaces. A lack of attention to other occupational risks arising from the pandemic such as psychosocial risks, was also pinpointed to be an area for improvement.

The ILO adopted several measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Vision Zero Fund project in Myanmar developed and implemented capacity-building and awareness-raising activities for a range of constituents and stakeholders in the garment supply chain, including a campaign on Facebook. Furthermore, it supported the then national Government in strengthening implementation of OSH measures in the target sectors and beyond.

This research highlights the efforts put into developing measures to support workplaces in the garment supply chain in Myanmar to prevent the spread of COVID-19, from the beginning of the pandemic until January 2021. It also identifies areas for OSH improvements in the continued response to COVID-19 and for Myanmar's garment supply chain looking forward.

ကားဆေးရန်သာသည့်
Spray Gun ထားရန်

1. Introduction

Vision Zero Fund[1] is an ILO programme working to prevent work-related accidents, injuries and diseases in global supply chains. In Myanmar, the Fund's project was officially launched in 2016 and works in the garment, agriculture and construction supply chains. As part of its strategy, the Fund implements a model of collective action for safe and healthy supply chains, involving a wide range of stakeholders and resources to address the root causes of the most serious OSH deficits in global supply chains. The project has been implementing activities in Myanmar since 2017.

To facilitate tailored and targeted interventions, an assessment of OSH drivers and constraints was conducted in the garment global supply chain. Based on the findings of this assessment,[2] the Vision Zero Fund project established partnerships with the Government, workers and employers' organizations aimed at addressing the OSH shortcomings that were identified in the supply chain and the gaps in Myanmar's national OSH system. As of 2020, the project had contributed to building the capacities of 252 garment workers and managers who participated in OSH trainings and awareness-raising activities. Furthermore, it helped to strengthen the capacities of employment injury institutions, which resulted in improvements in the delivery of benefits to an estimated 141,000 garment workers. The project also helped to strengthen tripartite dialogue on OSH and social security and contributed to the establishment of a National OSH Training Centre.

Lessons learned between 2017 and 2020 to catalyse OSH improvements highlight the importance of building the capacity of members of workers' organizations and the effectiveness of the training of trainers model. Lessons also show the importance of having functioning OSH management systems in place, bipartite OSH committees in factories and promoting learning across factories. Other factors spurring improvement are national legislation requirements on OSH and requirements related to OSH from global buyers.

COVID-19[3] has had significant impacts on demand and supply in global supply chains in Myanmar, with consequences for OSH. All indications are that COVID-19 has worsened the conditions for workers overall and particularly for those dependent on the continued operations of global supply chains, such as in the garment industry (Anner 2020; ILO 2020; Mengistu et al. 2020).

Garment supply chains and manufacturers in Asia – the largest global hub for production– have been severely impacted by the economic slow-down and measures aimed at halting the spread of COVID-19. Many businesses were forced to reduce or shut down operations either tempo-rarily or permanently, leaving millions of garment workers, the majority of whom are women, fur-loughed or facing reduced hours and income.

Internationally, global demand for garments was estimated to have contracted by 30 per cent in 2020 (McKinsey 2020). In Myanmar, in March

1 Vision Zero Fund is administered and implemented by the Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health (LABADMIN/OSH) Branch of the ILO. The Fund is a key component of the ILO's Safety + Health for All programme. For more information, see: www. ilo. org/vzf.

2 For more details about the findings from this assessment, see: Contri and Infante-Villarroel 2019

3 As of 31 October 2020, Myanmar had reported a total of 51,500 confirmed COVID-19 cases. Of these, 1, 240 died.

2020, the lack of raw materials from China led to the closure of at least 16 factories and the loss of 7,000 jobs (IndustriAll Global Union 2020). In October 2020, it was estimated that 84,438 garment workers from more than 328 factories had lost their jobs due to factory closures and the decrease in orders.

Vision Zero Fund's Myanmar project has implemented a number of measures to support stakeholders in the garment global supply chain in response to COVID-19. In 2020, the project launched a social media campaign reaching more than 4 million people (as of September 2020) to raise awareness about COVID-19 in the workplace, with several posts and videos tailored to garment workers.[4] In 2020, the Fund worked in close collaboration with the Government and workers' organizations to produce informational material on COVID-19, including on the return to work and social security benefits. A music video for workers and employers was also launched and has been widely broadcast. The project, moreover, developed a training of trainers' package for COVID-19 prevention and mitigation and a retraining package customized to the garment sector.[5] The roll-out of the training of trainers to employers' and workers' organization members started in September and October 2020.[6]

The efforts of multiple stakeholders have been mobilized in Myanmar and other countries in response to the COVID-19 crisis and to mitigate its consequences. As a result of the pandemic, more importance has been placed on OSH and challenges and opportunities for improvements in this sphere(Ryan and Htay 2021). Identifying, understanding and anticipating these challenges and opportunities and their interactions with OSH practices in global supply chains appear to be essential to informing stakeholders in the development of effective strategies to ensure safer and healthier supply chains.

In this context, the research in Myanmar was conducted as part of a broader global research initiative by Vision Zero Fund aimed at providing a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on OSH in global supply chains and stakeholders' strategies to mitigate the negative impacts on OSH at all levels of the chains. In addition to the work undertaken in Myanmar, research was carried out on the coffee global supply chain in Colombia and on the textiles/garment global supply chain in Ethiopia.

In Myanmar, the specific objectives of the case study were to:

a. identify OSH measures taken to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace level in select garment-producing factories (measures to support workplaces and measures taken at workplace level), with a particular emphasis on COVID-19 inspections;

b. examine the drivers and constraints for the development and implementation of OSH measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace;

c. examine whether the adoption (or failure to adopt) OSH measures was perceived to have had any effects on the safety and health of workers, business continuity, productivity and employment in the supply chain;

d. examine whether the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the sustainable sourcing practices of multinational enterprises; and

e. as certain any long-term measures adopted to prepare and respond to future epidemics.

4 The Facebook page is available at https://www. facebook. com/Together-we-can-prevent-COVID-103361088031052/ In 2021, the project is continuing the public awareness of COVID-19 prevention.

5 The package follows the Ministry of Health and Sports' guidelines, the ILO Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work Action Checklist (including the one for small- and medium-sized enterprises developed by the Fund and Sustainable, Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (SCORE). The training modules provide information on the transmission and symptoms of COVID-19, how to assess and mitigate risks in workplaces and how to implement and sustain a COVID-19 action plan. The package, including trainers' guides and manuals and learners' manuals for the garment sector, is available in both Burmese and English at the ILO's Yangon e-campus.

6 The Vision Zero Fund project in Myanmar trained a total of 142 master trainers (83 females) from CTUM, UMFCCI, MICS, IWFM, LHEO, ALR, CCTU, and multinational brands in September and December 2020. As of September 2021, these master trainers have so far retrained 655 participants (409 females) in the garment sector, first from October 2020 to January 2021, and then in the third wave from August to September 2021.

Research approach

The study used a qualitative approach that allowed for an examination of the experiences of developing, implementing and monitoring OSH prevention measures in the garment global supply chain in Myanmar in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings are supported by desk research and 72 key informant interviews with workers, employers (owners and managers of garment factories), occupational health professionals working in factories and representatives from: workers' organizations, regional labour authorities, the Social Security Board (SSB), labour inspectors and from a multinational brand sourcing from Myanmar. The study was limited to the Yangon, Bago, Pathein and Mandalay regions. The research was conducted from November 2020 to January 2021.

Of the 72 participants, 60 were workers from 37 factories located in Hlaing Thar Yar, ShwePyi Thar, Pathein, Bago and Hmawbi. The majority of the workers lived in the same area as their workplace, with only 25 per cent having to travel to their factory from another township, city or village. Three quarters (44) of the workers interviewed were women. Both women and men had an average age of 29.

There were 56 workers with permanent contracts and two with temporary contracts while two were daily workers. In total, 46 workers were members of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM) while 14 were not unionized. The majority of the workers worked in the sewing department and the rest were engaged in various jobs in, for example, ironing, machinery, packaging, quality assurance, supervisory, store keeping and branding.

The selection of regions for the study was made taking into account the different sizes and types of supply chain suppliers (for example, those certified/not certified); types of ownership such as local versus foreign direct investment (FDI); and type of end market.

Standard ethical procedures were observed in seeking informed consent of the participants and assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity.

A few limitations of the research should be noted. The qualitative case study design limits the generalizability of the study to the focus factories. The study, therefore, does not claim to represent all factories in all industrial parks[7] in Myanmar although reasonable extrapolations can be made to other factories with similar operations producing for the garment global supply chain in Myanmar.

The research was also limited by the COVID-19 restrictions, with data collection strategies confined to virtual interviews. Although observations on locations would have enhanced the study, these could not be conducted due to restrictions and ethical considerations for the safety of the researchers and participants. However, the combination of the desk review and interviews conducted virtually with a variety of stakeholders provided a good understanding of the Myanmar experience in the selected regions.

The findings from the research should be read in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar before February 2021. The findings and responses given by respondents do not reflect the situation in the country following the military takeover. The research was completed prior to the takeover.

Although the COVID-19 situation is constantly evolving and the research findings are limited in time, the findings remain of importance in highlighting areas for improvement in the ongoing response to COVID-19 and to inform strategies for OSH improvement in global supply chains.

7 An industrial park is a portion of a city that is zoned for industrial use rather than residential or commercial needs.

Implications of COVID-19 and regime change on employment in Myanmar

It is important to note that following the military takeover in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, the political crisis has paralyzed the economy, which was already weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic with serious impacts on enterprises and workers. Estimates indicate that there has been a continuous deterioration in labour market conditions since the military takeover (ILO 2021).

In the first half of 2021, an estimated 14 per cent of working hours were lost, which is equivalent to the working time of at least 2.2 million full-time workers. Employment contracted by an estimated 6 per cent in the second quarter of 2021compared to fourth quarter 2020, reflecting 1.2 million job losses, many of them among women. In the severely hit garment sector, an estimated 250,000 jobs (31 per cent) were lost during the first six months of 2021, with women accounting for approximately 86 per cent of employment losses. Likewise, working hours contracted by an estimated 57 per cent during that same period. Factory production slowed considerably as numerous global apparel buyers halted orders due to tightening international pressure and other factors (Paton 2021; ILO 2021).

According to the ILO brief on employment in Myanmar from July 2021 (ILO 2021), the military takeover and consequent political crisis have exacerbated the severe impacts of COVID-19.

As of 30 September 2021, Myanmar had reported approximately 464,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases and17,700 deaths.[1]

1 Trading Economics: https://tradingeconomics.com/myanmar/coronavirus-recovered.


Spray Gun

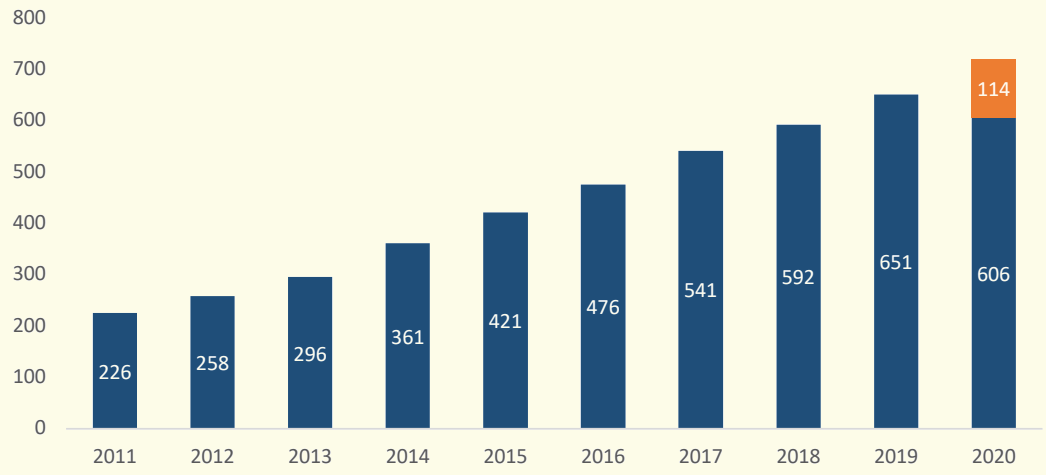

JUKI

2. Characteristics of the Myanmar garment global supply chain

This section is intended to provide an overview of the key trends in the garment sector in Myanmar over the last decade prior to the pandemic.

The Myanmar garment sector accounted for almost 30 per cent of total Myanmar exports in 2019, employing more than 440,000 workers, 90 per cent of whom were women. The number of MGMA member factories increased from 226 in 2011 to 720 in 2020 (including the 114 factories that were permanently or temporarily closed in 2020 due to the pandemic).

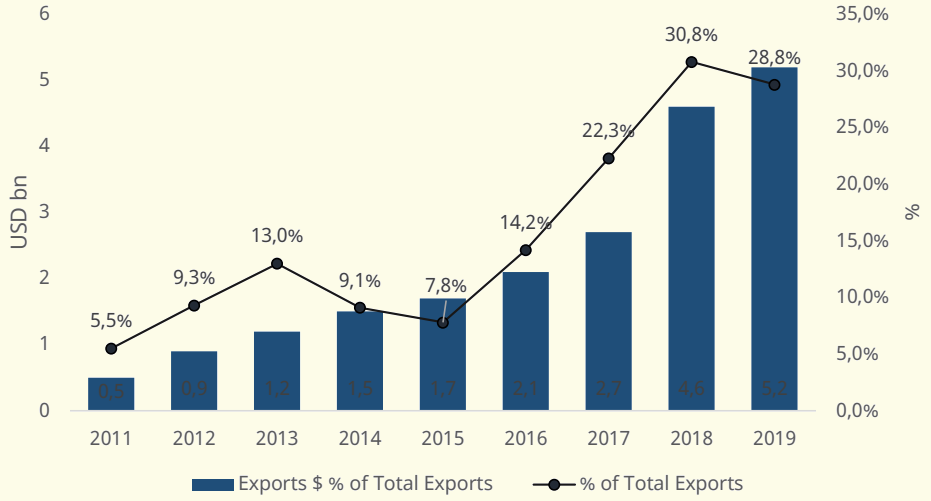
Figure 1. Total number of MGMA member companies, 2011-20



Source: MGMA 2020

Approximately 90 per cent of the factories were export oriented. However many of them accepted orders from local buyers during the low export demand seasons between January and February and September and October. The value of Myanmar's garment exports increased tenfold from less than US$500 million in 2011 to US$5.2 billion in 2019.

Figure 2. Myanmar garment exports in US dollars and as a percentage of total Myanmar exports, 2011-19



Source: MGMA 2020

Since 2013, the Government of Myanmar has allowed 100 per cent foreign ownership in the garment sector in order to boost the industry and raise industry standards.

This has led to increased foreign interest, with brands such as Inditex, H&M, Marks and Spencer, Primark, C&A, Lidl and Best Seller sourcing from Myanmar.

Figure 3. Overview of foreign, local and joint venture garment factories in Myanmar

Foreign - owned factories	**67% of total factories** **80% of total employees**	• As of 2018, accounted for 67% of all RMG manufacturers in Myanmar, and 80% of all workers employed by the garment factories. • Foreign parent companies outsource CMP orders to Myanmar for standardized manufacturing. • Average employee size of foreign-owned factories was 918 employees as of 2017.
Local factories	**28% of total factories** **15% of total employees**	• Primarily CMP orders and subcontracting from larger factories and foreign firms that face capacity constraints. • Lower attention on adherence to industry standards and procurement of compliance certifications with low-quality controls. • Fewer employees compared to foreign-owned or joint venture factories, with an average of 405 employees as of August 2017.
Joint venture factories	**5% of total factories** **5% of total employees**	• Primarily CMP orders from the respective partner companies. Head offices bid and secure FOB contracts from clients and then sign CMP contracts with their joint venture(s) in Myanmar. The raw materials are sourced primarily from China.

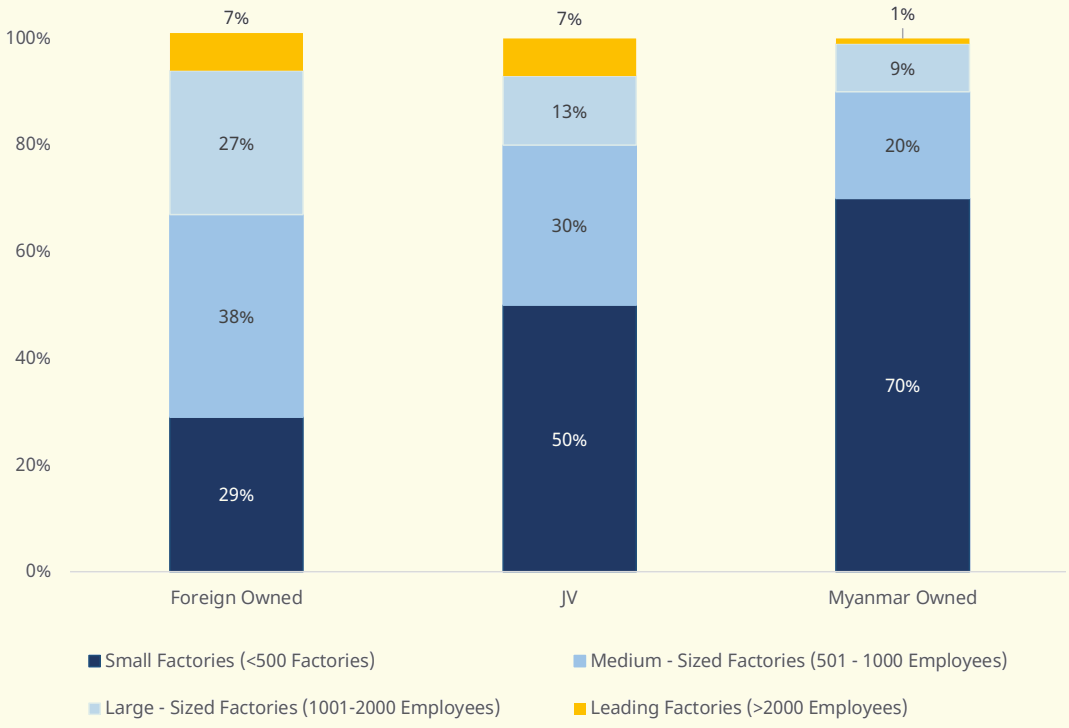
Source: EuroCham Myanmar 2019

The majority of orders in Myanmar garment factories are carried out on cut-make-pack (CMP) contracts. Manufacturers lack the technical, human and financial capacity needed to move to free on board (FOB), original design manufacturing (ODM) or original brand manufacturing (OBM) type of contracts.

CMP contracts offer marginal profits to the manufacturers, making it challenging for them to reinvest in the facilities and human resources needed to integrate further in the value chain and offer additional services. Only 10 per cent of the estimated 355 foreign-owned factories have started transitioning towards FOB with an output of less than 5 per cent of the total value. Factories would have to build in-house design, procurement and outbound shipping teams and invest in storage and warehouse facilities in order to vertically integrate in the value chain and secure FOB contracts (MGMA 2020).

According to the MGMA, 42 per cent of factories in Myanmar have less than 500 employees, 32 per cent employ between 501 and 1,000 people, 21 per cent between 1,001 and 2,000 people and only 5 percent or 28 factories had more than 2,000 employees as of August 2019. In terms of local factories, 90 per cent are either small or medium sized, employing fewer than 1,000 people. In contrast, 34 per cent of the foreign-owned and 20 per cent of the joint venture factories employ more than 1,000 employees per company. The data highlights the significance of FDI for employment opportunities (MGMA 2020).

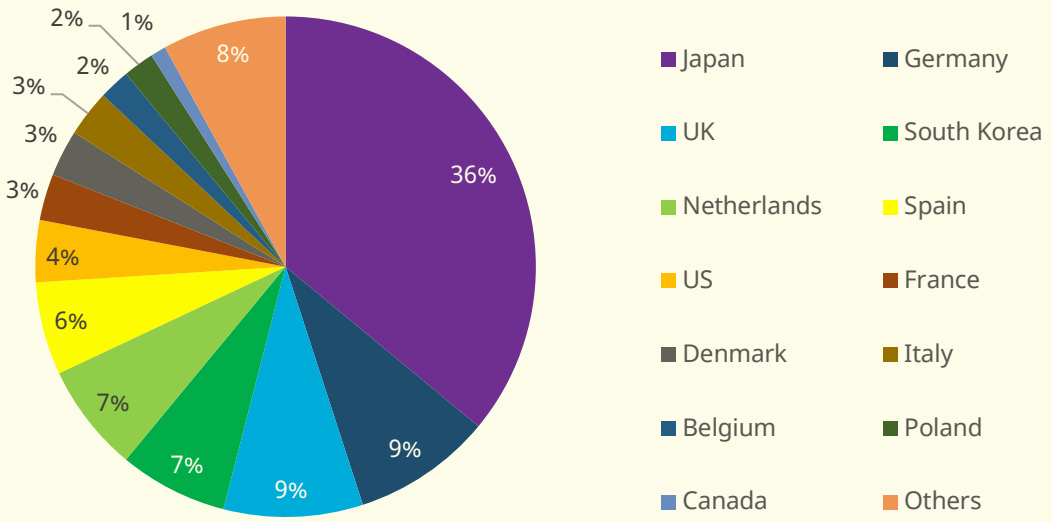
Figure 4. Percentage of factories in Myanmar by size and investment type



Source: EuroCham Myanmar 2019

Foreign-owned factories are better equipped to improve productivity and wield an advantage over their counterparts in the Myanmar market as they can leverage the experience and expertise of their respective parent companies.

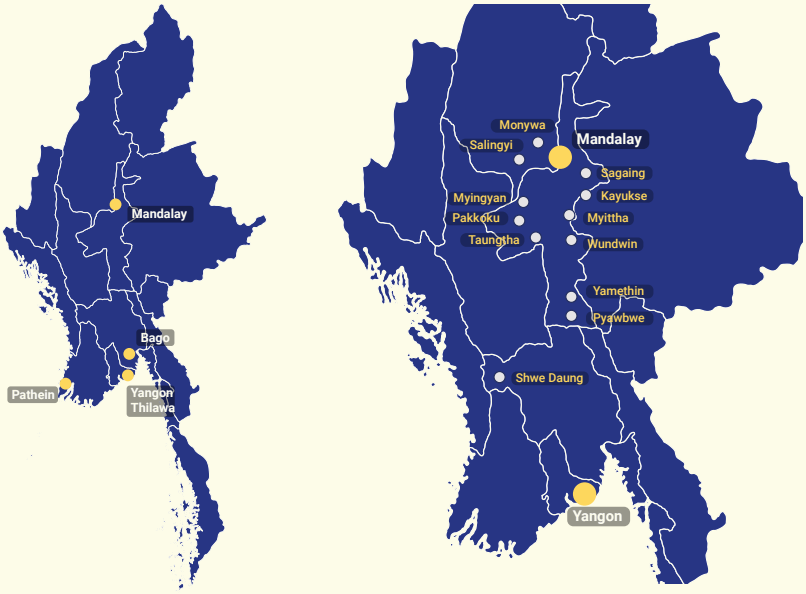
Figure 5. Share of Myanmar's garment exports by country - 2018



Source: EuroCham Myanmar 2019

The largest export market for Myanmar's garment sector in 2018 was Japan, with 36 per cent of total garment exports, while the European Union and the United Kingdom accounted for more than 44 per cent of exports for the same year (EuroCham Myanmar 2019).

Figure 6. Location of garment factories and state-owned textile factories in Myanmar



Source: EuroCham Myanmar 2019

The biggest concentration of garment factories is in the Yangon area, with almost half being located in Hlaing Thayar industrial zone, ShwePyi Thar Township and on the outskirts of Yangon. There are some newly established production sites in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone in the southeast of Yangon (MGMA 2020).

Other areas where factories are located include, by order of importance: Bago, Pathein and Hpa-An.

Mandalay is also an important centre for the garment industry, primarily for the production of textiles for the domestic market.

Furthermore, the Heavy Industrial Enterprise (HIE3) under the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Industry owned and operated 13 textile factories for the Government of Myanmar in 2019. The map above (figure 6) shows their location.

3. COVID-19 and the garment global supply chain in Myanmar

Myanmar saw its first confirmed case of COVID-19 at the end of March 2020 and recorded approximately 140,000 cases up to 31 January 2021. Of these, 124,000 are reported to have recovered and 3,130 to have died.[8] Limited testing capacity has fuelled fears that Myanmar's outbreak may have been under-reported (Wai 2020).

Most employers, health professionals and union representatives interviewed reported first hearing of COVID-19 in December 2019, but news was limited and did not alert most people to take action. Garment factory employers with either owners or partners in China were alerted to the economic and social risks of the pandemic quite early compared with other businesses in Myanmar. However, most actors in the supply chain and within the Government did not begin preparations until late January 2020.

In March 2020, the Government of Myanmar with support from the WHO developed a contingency plan that was finalized in April 2020 called the "Health Sector Contingency Plan for Outbreak Response on COVID-19 and Other Emerging Respiratory Disease in Myanmar" (WHO 2020). The purpose of the document was to provide a national level contingency plan for managing the comprehensive health sector response to COVID-19. The Plan offered immediate guidance for priority areas and the actions that needed to be taken for adequate prevention and response to a probable community transmission of the virus. The key objectives of the Plan were to:

- provide reliable and accurate information on COVID-19 to health professionals and the public;
- lay out the coordination mechanism for all key stakeholders at central, state/region and township levels to jointly implement the identified public health measures for preventing and managing COVID-19 outbreaks at community level; and
- identify resource needs and gaps to respond to COVID-19 at four stages (preparedness phase, containment phase, control and mitigation phase, and stand-down phase) and in eight key areas (surveillance, point of entry, national laboratory system, clinical management and medical care services, infection prevention and control, non-pharmaceutical public health measures, risk communication, and operational support and logistics management).

Guidelines were also developed for various categories of businesses to instruct business owners on which measures, safeguards and mechanisms they were expected to implement in order to protect the health of workers and be permitted to operate (section 3.1 provides details on the guidelines and instructions for garment factories).

A large number of local stakeholders in Myanmar shared different levels of responsibility to address the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders included:

- **The COVID-19 Committee**: Formally named the "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Control and Emergency Response Committee", it was established with notification No. 53/2020, on 4 April 2020. The role of the Committee was to coordinate the national effort against COVID-19, issue

8 Trading Economics: https://tradingeconomics. com/myanmar/coronavirus-recovered

regulations and measures, analyse testing and tracing results and report them to the public, and inform the public as well as the business sector and all stakeholders on the evolution of the situation (President's Office 2020).

- **Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS)**: Given its mandate to promote health and safety in Myanmar, the MOHS was in charge of developing guidelines and measures for factories and other businesses.
- **Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MOLIP)**: MOLIP was given the responsibility of announcing which types of businesses and services would be considered essential (Baker McKenzie 2020).
- **Inspectorates**: An announcement issued on 19 April 2020 indicated that combined expert teams from the MOHS and MOLIP would conduct inspections of relevant factories, workplaces and establishments from 20 to 30 April 2020, and that they would be allowed to reopen only after meeting stipulated requirements.[9]

A number of actions, responses and factors had a strong impact on the Myanmar garment sector. The most relevant and salient of these were:

- On 12 April, factories halted operations for the Thingyan New Year Festival.
- On 19 April, factories nationally were ordered to remain closed until 30 April and not to reopen before being inspected by the MOHS. **This will be referred to as the first lockdown**;
- Inspections started on 20 April and continued well into May 2020.
- Factories reopened after the inspections for about three to four months, until the end of September 2020.
- On 20 September, the MOHS instructed the whole of the Yangon region to stay at home. With this announcement, workers at CMP factories were not allowed to go to work for two weeks from 24 September to 7 October 2020. The lockdown was subsequently extended to 21 October 2020. **This will be referred to as the second lockdown**.

Access to social security benefits

On 20 March 2020, MOLIP requested factories to ensure that their workers were correctly enrolled in the SSB scheme and that all payments into the fund were up to date. Factories were required to inform the SSB of factory closures and wait for an inspection to confirm that the closure was legitimate, otherwise SSB payments would be suspended.

Once reopened, a factory was expected to communicate the information to the SSB within ten working days (on penalty of being charged under s.69 and s.94 (b) of the Social Security Law). Workers made redundant as a result of permanent or temporary closures were eligible (under s.73 of the Social Security Law) to receive:

- healthcare coverage for six months;
- financial support of up to 60 per cent of their latest salary for up to six months (provided they had paid four months of SSB fees within six months before a sick day);
- coverage of funeral expenses;
- coverage of medicine and transportation expenses;
- maternity benefits.

9 Vision Zero Fund provided support with translation and dissemination of this announcement and several other guidelines issued by the Government following the pandemic.

Table 1 summarizes the list of benefits made available by the SSB:

▶ Table 1. Social Security Board benefits during COVID-19

#	Eligible person	Benefit	Income replacement	Duration	Remark
1	Current SSB insured workers who have to quarantine	Sickness cash benefit	60% (average last four months' salary)	28 days	Required six months of registration and four months of contribution.
2	Current SSB insured workers who are sick	Sickness cash benefit	60% (average last four months' salary)	26 weeks	Required six months of registration and four months of contribution.
3	Current SSB insured pregnant women (before enjoying maternity benefit)	Maternity cash benefit	60% (average last four months' salary)	Eight weeks per time and up to 26 weeks	For the duration of COVID-19 crisis as per MOHS guidelines.
4	Current SSB insured workers impacted by temporary factory closure	Income support	40% of January salary	Depends on number of factory closure days	No contribution period required.
5	Ex-SSB insured workers who are laid off due to factory closure (workers who previously worked for a factory but were then let go)	Sickness cash benefit	60% (average last four months' salary)	26 weeks	Right to claim this benefit within one year from the date of dismissal.
		Medical reimbursement	Depends on the claim amount		

Source: SSB

The COVID-19 Fund and financial assistance

On 18 March 2020, the Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry announced a stimulus package referred to as the COVID-19 Fund, with total funding of 100 billion Myanmar kyat (50 billion Myanmar kyat from the Government's revolving fund and 50 billion from its Social Security Fund).

A second tranche of funding was approved by the Ministry on 15October 2020. It was estimated that 70 per cent of all funds distributed were absorbed by manufacturing businesses, with garment factories expected to comprise a sizeable portion of these. Additional research is necessary to collect precise data on total disbursements to the sector and the timelines. The COVID-19 Fund allowed enterprises impacted by the pandemic to obtain 12-month loans at a 1 percent interest rate.

On 8 April 2020, the European Union announced a €5 million emergency cash fund (European Union External Action Service 2020) to provide monetary support to:

- workers who were made redundant and/or would face eviction from their home;
- workers whose contracts were illegally terminated; and
- workers at enterprises which agree to retain workers and to provide at least matching support.

The selection of workers was made in cooperation with local trade unions and the emergency fund (operated by UNOPS) partnered with Wave Money to ensure digital distribution.

The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT) in partnership with the Myanmar Department of Social Welfare made available a US$9 million fund to mothers, pregnant women and social pension beneficiaries (LIFT 2020). This fund provided a one-off transfer of 30,000 Myanmar kyat to selected workers.

4. Measures to support workplaces in the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 in the garment global supply chain in Myanmar

A range of mechanisms were put in place to support garment factories to prevent exposure to COVID-19 in workplaces. These included the development of guidelines and instructions for employers and workers and conducting workplace inspections to ensure compliance with requirements. Measures taken to support workplaces in the supply chain to prevent the spread of the virus were spearheaded by the MOHS' Occupational and Environmental Health Division, which took the lead role in inspection efforts in Myanmar.

4.1 Development of guidelines and instructions for factories

The Government released a guideline for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in factories, other workplaces and construction sites on 19 March 2020. The provisions were further updated and expanded with a collection of publications, guidelines and instructions, detailed in table 2 below:

▶ **Table 2. Evolution of guidelines over time**

Date	Announcement	Version
19 March 2020	Instructions for factories and workplaces to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	1.0
30 March 2020	Instructions for factories, workplaces and construction sites to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	2.0
19 April 2020	Instructions for factories, workplaces and construction sites to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	3.0
-	Plan for further oversight of control for factories and workplaces to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	-
5 June 2020	Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) prevention and control inspection of factories, workshops and workplaces form (a, b and c)	-

Date	Announcement	Version
-	Daily summary of form (a) inspection of factors to be performed in factories, workshops and workplaces	-
-	Factory workshops summary of inspection findings and actions to be taken in the workplace	-
-	Factory workshops daily report form for COVID-19 for tasks	-
26 June 2020	Instructions for factories, workplaces and construction sites to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	4.0
26 August 2020	Guidelines to follow for factories, workplace to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	4.1
1 September 2020	Reminder for factories, workplaces and construction sites to prevent the spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	-
9 October 2020	Instructions for factories, workplaces and construction sites to prevent Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)	5.0

It was reported that once the different instructions were published on 20 April 2020, the requirements and measures became clearer to both employers and workers.

Following these requirements and with support from the Vision Zero Fund, employers received training on how to make the necessary changes in their factories. Safeguarding measures were classified into four categories: 1) workforce and workplace protection, 2) high-risk people protection, 3) business processes adaptation, and 4) employer-led interventions. The ILO training material also specified employers' responsibilities to ensure that workers were registered with the SSB and that payments for all workers were up to date so that workers could access a variety of benefits (as previously described).[10]

The latest guidelines for prevention and control of COVID-19 in factories, from 9 October 2020, stipulate that for workplaces where it is impossible to work from home, there should be appropriate ventilation, face-to-face work should be avoided as much as possible, and workers placed side by side and six feet away from each other (EuroCham Myanmar, 2020). For factories which are unable to strictly follow these physical distancing measures, the following requirements are stipulated:

- To practice work shifts;

(or)

- Workers must wear face shield, and arrangements should be made to avoid face to face work and to install separators;

(or)

- Only 50% of existing workforce are assigned to work every other day or to work depending on the needs of their business; and the rest of the workers who do not have to come to work should stay at home or in dormitories. (EuroCham Myanmar, 2020)

10 The training package, including trainers' guides and manuals and learners' manuals for the garment sector, is available in both Burmese and English at the ILO Yangon e-campus. The package follows the MOHS guidelines and the ILO Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work Action Checklist and Follow-up, including the one for small and medium-sized enterprises developed by Vision Zero Fund and SCORE.

The guideline from October 2020 also includes requirements on the following:

- Handwashing with soap or hand sanitizers (with at least 60% alcohol) should be done frequently;
- Employers must provide adequate hand washing facilities and adequate provision of soap, water, hand sanitizer and tissue paper;
- Posters showing how to wash hands should be placed next to hand washing stations;
- Workers must be required to wear the necessary personal protective equipment, including masks that cover mouth and nose;
- Measuring body temperature of workers should be done when entering the workplace. Workers with high body temperature should not be allowed to come to work and arrangements should be made for medical treatment;
- In dining room, arrangements should be made for workers to have their food and drink at a distance of six feet from each other, and if workers are face to face, separators must be installed;
- Arrangements should be made for frequent disinfection of contact areas (e. g. surface of tables) and of equipment used by staff;
- In transportation by ferries, requirements for physical distancing, provision of hand sanitizers, disposable tissues and face mask, and disinfection should be followed. Health awareness information podcasts and announcement should also be broadcasted during transport;
- Arrangements should be made for pregnant women and for workers over 50 years of age and with pre-existing health conditions (such as hypertension, diabetes and workers who are immunosuppressed).[11] (EuroCham Myanmar, 2020)

4.2 Workplace inspections

Workplace inspections began on 20 April 2020 after the first lockdown. The MOHS developed a checklist for use during inspections to evaluate compliance with the prevention measures in factories (such as physical distancing, use of PPE and disinfection). The full checklist is provided in Annex 1.

The multinational brand representative who was interviewed as well as representatives from participating factories explained that after the inspections, factories were classified according to a three-tier system using A, B or C ratings, as follows:

- "A": factories respecting most of the guideline requirements, with only rapid and minimal changes to be made to the floor design/adaptations. These factories were allowed to resume operations immediately.
- "B": factories respecting the most important guideline requirements but needing some critical improvement in their floor design. A frequent issue was provision of the correct number of handwashing stations. These factories were also allowed to resume operations but were given a list of items to remedy and told to expect a reinspection at any moment. This research has found evidence of only a few cases in which re-inspections were conducted, all with prior notification and via Zoom.
- "C": factories not respecting the minimal requirements for reopening. This research was not able to identify any evidence of factories rated C.

After the second lockdown (September and October 2020), factories which had already undergone inspections were allowed to reopen. Factories which had previously been ranked A had the right to resume operations immediately. Factories which had been ranked B had to request permission and potentially undergo a reinspection. From the interviews, it appeared that in practice all these factories were allowed to reopen, with a few cases identified where reinspection was conducted.

11 For more details on the requirements see the guidelines issued by MOHS' Occupational and Environmental Health Division

4.3 Challenges and opportunities for improvement in supporting workplaces

As in most countries, there were some major challenges in Myanmar that the Government and industries faced at the beginning of the pandemic. These included a lack of: clarity on roles and responsibilities; coordination among various offices and actors engaged in the response; and clear communication and information-sharing. There were also resource constraints. Over time, some of these challenges were addressed.

The research findings suggest that the development and implementation of measures might have benefitted from stronger collaboration to effectively map areas of responsibility and mobilize resources to avoid the lack of coordination and confusion which were reported.

Coordination and resource challenges

Interviews with the SSB, the Factories and General Labour Laws Inspection Department and Hlaing Htar Yar Industrial Zone Committee revealed the need for stronger coordination among the wide array of representatives from different organizations that were supposed to participate in factory inspections. The lead organization reportedly had insufficient data on factory workforce size, location and current situation to adequately coordinate and organize inspections.

From interviews with representatives from the inspection department, it appeared that the Factory General Labour Laws Inspection Department of MOLIP was not involved in the development of the guidelines or the prioritization of factories to be inspected but was more involved in an operational capacity (providing inspectors and coordinating with factories and local business associations).

A representative from the Factory General Labour Laws Inspection Department indicated that the following entities and departments were required to participate in the inspections:

- Yangon Region Government
- Industrial Zone Development Supervision Committee
- Yangon Regional Health Department
- Factories and General Labour Laws Inspection Department
- Department of Labour Administration
- Social Security Board
- Department of Labour Relations
- Yangon Region Investment Committee
- Department of Industrial Supervision and Inspection

Given the scale of the work required from the inspectorate departments, there was an acute shortage of inspectors, which created operational delays. Representatives interviewed also indicated a lack of available PPE for them to carry out their functions, challenges in transportation and lack of timely information. The multinational brand and factory representatives reported that an additional hurdle was the fact that inspectors were not well trained on how to use the checklists or on providing guidance to the factories on how to comply with requirements.

The brand representative also indicated inconsistencies in how arrangements for inspections were made in different regions or locations. It was reported that roles and procedures varied in different locations or regions. In one region, an employer might obtain an inspection visit by contacting the MOHS, while in another region a different factory would have to reach out to their known contacts in the Factory General Labour Laws Inspection Department.

Workers' organizations indicated the need for more stringent, regular and in-person inspections (not online) to ensure that factories continued to enforce the measures.

Communication and information-sharing

During the first round of inspections immediately after the first lockdown (20 April 2020), factories reportedly had a limited understanding of the inspection guidelines. Representatives from both factories and the Factory General Labour Laws Inspection Department confirmed this during interviews. Employers and the multinational brand representative indicated that during the first few weeks, there was confusion as to how a factory could request an inspection or be placed on a reservation/waiting list for inspection.

While the MOHS had the official lead on inspections, it was unclear to factory managers, owners and employers' organizations which department they were supposed to contact. This finding reflects the one presented previously regarding lack of coordination, suggesting that the departments lacked a strategic approach to factory selection or prioritization for inspections.

A number of factories reported that they sent their staff to the offices of the inspectorate department to urge inspectors to visit their factories. The MGMA and the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (UMFCCI) contacted the COVID-19 Committee to better understand, on behalf of their members, when factories could expect to be inspected.

Additional responses from the multinational brand and employers' representatives indicated that there were frequent issues with the way information was communicated. For example, regulations or guidelines were of ten announced in the evenings, to take effect the following day (this also applied to factory closures and reopening announcements). The announcement of changes or new regulations with very little preparation time was reported as extremely challenging for garment factories employing hundreds or even thousands of workers.

Factories reported that they were better prepared and informed during the second lockdown than they were for the first. For one thing, the Government and other bodies, such as the Hlaing Htar Yar Industrial Zone Committee, had developed procedures to improve communication with the factories.

The Hlaing Htar Yar Industrial Zone Committee played a coordinating role between inspectorates and local counterparts (for example, the factories and other departments involved). In interviews, the Committee indicated that it had coordinated the inspection dates and follow-up for the results and maintained an open communication channel with the inspectorate on identification of COVID-19 cases and other dynamics as a spontaneous response to the problem of lack of coordination in managing the crisis.

The majority of workers reported being aware of inspections conducted by government authorities, stating that their purpose was to check if the factories were in compliance with the rules and regulations announced by the Government. However, they had limited information on who had visited the factory and the result of the inspections. Some mentioned that they had received suggestions on physical distancing measures (such as avoiding crowds and distance between work stations), measures related to hygiene (for example, adding posters to inform workers, promoting handwashing and having more handwashing stations) and the use of PPE.

Some said that they knew the results of the inspections and were aware of the inspection grade that the factory had received and mentioned that recommendations from the inspectors had been implemented.

5. Occupational safety and health measures in factories to prevent the spread of COVID-19

5.1 Measures implemented at workplace level to prevent exposure to COVID-19

Most of the workers interviewed said that they had been aware of COVID-19 since early 2020, when the news from Wuhan, China, started to spread around the world. Others were informed between February and April 2020, as the media in Myanmar featured more coverage and the first positive cases in the country emerged. The majority of study participants first received the news through social media, mainly Facebook, television and local newspapers. A small number also reported hearing about the pandemic through their local authorities and the MOHS.

Workers' knowledge about the development of OSH preventive measures in workplaces was limited. Only a minority reported being aware of who was involved in the development of the COVID-19 preventive measures in the factories in which they worked. Few reported the existence of factory committees composed of representatives from management, human resources, administration departments and workers in some of the cases. In these instances, the committees appeared not to be functional.

Only a limited number of workers mentioned that there was a proactive[12] approach regarding adoption and implementation of any kind of preventive measures in the factories. According to workers, only in a few factories, measures were implemented to prevent the spread of the virus before the Government announced COVID-19-related directives.

On the other hand, employers signalled that a number of preventive measures were taken proactively. The first actions taken revolved primarily around information-sharing on the importance of hygiene and attention to personal health, as well as the use of face masks. In a few cases, preventive measures (installation of additional water sinks and sanitation of contact points daily) were put in place and PPE was provided. However, the bulk of actions took place after government directives were announced.

In terms of information-sharing, the majority of workers reported that during the initial days of the pandemic, no information was provided at work. In factories where information was provided, it was done with the factory microphones to inform everyone or through meetings with workers' organizations, which subsequently communicated the information to workers.

12 Note: Proactive in this case is defined as acting before COVID-19 cases were reported in the area or in the country. Reactive is defined in this case as acting after cases were confirmed in the area or after government directives.

Later, according to workers, the main recommendations that employers communicated to workers during the COVID-19 first wave were to:

- Avoid crowds in the workplace and especially during lunch time.
- Wear face masks.
- Wash hands regularly.
- Focus on good nutrition in order to keep the immune system strong.
- Follow the rules of the MOHS.

The information provided appeared to be on a one-off basis as workers reported that they did not receive regular updates. Nor was any training provided. While workers who were interviewed said that physical distancing and PPE requirements were made clear on factory floors, they received limited information from factory management, gleaning bits of information through other channels (such as other workers, unions and word of mouth).

In workplaces, workers reported physical distancing measures, access to handwashing stations with soap and water and temperature checks. A culture of sanitizing workstations was promoted and there was signposting around the workplace to inform workers on good hygiene/safety practices. To a lesser extent, PPE and disinfection gel were provided. A few workers also reported the installation of barriers, improved ventilation, shift work to avoid large groups of workers and discouraging the sharing of items.

These measures were reportedly taken in factories after directives from the MOHS were published. However, according to workers, their implementation appeared to bein consistent. While temperature checks were enforced in all factories and almost all implemented disinfection measures (such as the installation of handwashing stations with soap and sign-postings to inform workers about good hygiene/safety practices around the workplace), only a few workers reported that a distance of six feet (2 meters) or more was enforced, as required by government guidelines. Additionally, organization of different shifts to reduce crowds in the workplace, although reported by a few workers, appeared to be one of the measures least adopted.

Workers' organizations reported that the provision of PPE (masks) by factories was sometimes not done or done only occasionally and that items were not of the right quality. Moreover, supervisors did not enforce the measures on factory floors, leaving workers to disregard them.

Provisions for special categories of workers also appeared inadequate. While some workers reported that leave for pregnant women, older workers and people with underlying medical problems was allowed in accordance with the Social Security Law, the majority did not notice any specific measures adopted for these categories of workers.

Transportation by ferries (to and from work) for workers appeared to be a common practice across most factories. However, reports varied as to the measures that were taken on board, with the majority of workers saying no measures were taken to prevent exposure to and transmission of COVID–19, while a few workers said that there was hand disinfecting before boarding and mandatory use of face masks and face shields while on board.

Only a minority of the workers who were interviewed reported living in accommodation provided by their employer, adding that no measures were taken to protect them from the spread of COVID-19 in these lodgings.

It seems that over time some lessons were learned as differences were reported between the first and second waves of the pandemic. Workers reported that they received greater support in the second wave, such as more PPE (masks or face shields) and hand disinfectant (gel). They also spoke of better arrangements for transportation and more temperature checks.

When asked about the existence of workplace action plans in the event of a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case, most workers reported not being aware of such plans. Nevertheless, based on the knowledge of a few workers, actions that were taken to deal with positive cases included:

- immediate transportation to the clinic and quarantine centre (with transportation provided either by the employer or the workers' organization);
- one week of paid leave for any person who was in close contact with the COVID-19-positive patient;
- close surveillance for any person that was in close contact with the COVID-19-positive patient; and
- isolation and sanitation of materials used by the worker who tested positive.

5.2 Drivers and challenges for measures implemented at the workplace level

Factory representatives were asked a range of questions about their motivation to implement OSH measures in relation to the pandemic. The main drivers reported were government and multinational brand requirements, the protection of workers and business continuity.

Requirements instituted by the Government that factories had to comply with (as seen in checklists and inspections) were key drivers in the adoption of OSH measures in the workplace. Buyers' expectations also appeared to be an important factor.

Factories reported a combination of genuine concern over the well-being of the large numbers of workers they employed and ensuring business continuity as additional drivers for the preventive measures taken. It was important to safeguard workers' safety and health and to retain workers in light of fears about absenteeism, which some factories experienced, to maintain productivity levels.

In addition to the drivers, the study also revealed a number of challenges primarily relating to compliance with the COVID-19 preventive OSH measures. Responses from various interviewees (but largely from the multinational brand and factory representatives) signalled that the main challenges were:

- **Ensuring physical distancing during lunch and break times**: In garment factories, the space reserved for workers to eat is limited and not designed to provide the required physical distancing. All factories regardless of size had an immediate issue with this requirement. One solution applied was to split lunchtime into two to four shifts (depending on the workforce size of the factory).
- **Ensuring physical distancing in factories**: Ensuring a distance of at least six feet between workers appeared challenging in a number of factories. Factory floor plans in many garment factories were not designed to provide this measure of spacing between workers. Distance was particularly an issue in the sorting, cutting, packaging and sewing stations. Factories encountered issues in restructuring their floor plans to accommodate a similar number of workers but with much larger spaces between them. From interviews with the brand representative and employers, a solution appeared to be installing make shift separators between sewing stations with plastic sheets held up by tubes and/or metal structures. These actions occurred between the first and second lockdowns and were accepted as adequate by inspectors. However, only a few workers reported installation of separators, with most noting that the distance requirement was not enforced.
- **Providing the right number and type of handwashing stations**: Factories were unclear on the number of washing stations necessary relative to the number of workers and what type of station was appropriate.
- **Ensuring physical distancing on transport vehicles**: Ensuring the appropriate distancing in transportation (to and from the factories) proved challenging for a number of factories. While a few factories purchased or hired additional vehicles, not all were able to afford this. As previously mentioned, only a few workers reported hand disinfection before boarding and mandatory use of face masks and face shields while on board.

6. Multinational brand's response to COVID-19 in the Myanmar garment global supply chain

The multinational brand representative interviewed reported that the enterprise took a series of steps to support its supplier factories. The main driver for this action was the safety of workers as well as the importance of maintaining strategic business relationships with factories that had produced for the company for a number of years. The key actions that the multinational enterprise took to support workplaces were:

- Communicating with the Government and other stakeholders to gain as much clarity as possible about regulations, measures and requirements imposed on factories. In the interview, the brand representative indicated that obtaining clear information was especially challenging at the beginning of the first lockdown, when measures and restrictions were just being developed.
- Providing its factories with trainings, guidance and other materials, as required.
- Trying to support the factories' business operations by extending purchase orders as much as possible and guaranteeing as many orders as possible.

The point was made, however, that even the most socially responsible brands had to scale down the size and number of orders they placed with factories across the world. Other brands were reportedly less involved and changed orders frequently. Such actions, it was reported, deprived factories of the ability to plan their activities in the near and medium term.

Individual buyers did not appear to impose specific COVID-19-related requirements on their factories. Mainly, they asked them to comply with local regulations and required them to obtain authorization from the local authorities to operate. Additionally, the international brand provided pamphlets, guidelines and other documents illustrating the need for physical distancing, mask-wearing and the use of other PPE.

Most international buyers usually audit (directly or indirectly) their suppliers to check for compliance on a range of indicators, including OSH. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the buyers (and their third-party auditors) were not able to visit the factories and therefore were only able to conduct remote assessments. This affected the quality of the audit and eliminated spot audits as remote assessments had to be planned in advance.

Furthermore, most of the focus of these assessments in 2020 was on COVID-19-related issues, with less attention therefore given to other matters, such as other types of OSH concerns and overtime pay.

7. Effects of COVID-19 and the occupational safety and health measures implemented to prevent exposure to COVID-19

The aim of this research was to gain the lived experiences of the stakeholders who participated in the study rather than to quantify impacts. The study, therefore, sought to capture the perceptions of the participants in regards to the effects of the pandemic-led OSH measures on workers and businesses in the Myanmar garment global supply chain.

7.1 Effects on workers

The majority of the workers interviewed for this research said there had been a positive COVID-19 case in the factory where they worked, but almost all reported feeling safe with the measures implemented in the factories. They also felt that the measures were effective in containing the spread of the virus.

Nevertheless, workers also identified gaps in some measures such as the lack of sufficient PPE and hygiene-related supplies (disinfectant gels), as indicated previously. Workers also felt less safe while traveling to and from work due to crowded ferry routes and a shortage of PPE used on ferries. Workers' organizations also reported shortages of PPE (namely masks) provided by factories along with PPE quality issues, and that supervisors did not enforce the measures on factory floors, leaving workers to disregard them.

Workers also noted some constraints in carrying out their work due to the preventive measures implemented and stated that work had become more complex or demanding. "We are busier now than before, " one worker said. This appeared to be mainly due to pressures to maintain production under a more challenging environment and the constraints of working while complying with measures. For example, there were complaints about the wearing of masks and/or face shields, mostly to do with breathing difficulties and feeling hot or more stressed. "We have difficulties breathing while wearing masks and it is inconvenient to work when we wear a face shield, "another worker said.

Loss of income due to reduced hours or factory closures was also reported – more so during the first lockdown. During the second lockdown income losses were more attributable to increased costs for purchasing PPE and/or special arrangements for transport to and from work.

During the second lockdown, the majority of workers said that they faced difficulties returning to their hometowns and families as movement restrictions were enforced and in some cases they were not even able to send money home. Some workers also reported hardships in covering their basic daily expenses.

Instances of factories firing workers who complained about non-compliance with OSH requirements (especially members of workers' organizations) were also reported.

7.2 Effects on businesses

The garment industry and its stakeholders suffered a range of impacts due to the spread of COVID-19.

Employers pointed to a reduction in the size and number of orders received as a direct result of the pandemic. In some cases, factories were asked or were allowed to complete the orders already placed, while in other cases buyers suspended all orders, including some already placed for the near future. The brand representative said that all brands foresaw a reduction in their sales due to the pandemic and had to reduce their future orders. Lockdowns and closures also affected the ability of factories to fulfill orders.

Employers also reported having to deal with an increased rate of absenteeism which they attributed to workers' concerns over safety (in interviews, however, workers did not share such worries about their safety) and the fact that some workers who went back to their homes in other regions were unable to return to work because of travel restrictions.

Nevertheless, employers reported that OSH measures on the factory floors were useful and that, over time, they increased workers' confidence about going to work. That said, they reported that the usefulness was limited by the fact that, outside of large factory establishments, there was no enforcement of safe distances, mask-wearing or other safe practices. Factory managers and health staff said that workers lived in crowded apartments or guesthouses and ate and shopped in busy markets where no safety measures were applied, and were therefore more likely to contract the virus in these places and carry it into the factories.

Few employers perceived that OSH measures reduced the ability of factories to produce at normal capacity, affecting productivity. Where this was the case, it was mainly due to physical distancing requirements between workers, which reduced the total number of workers that the factory could accommodate at one time. However, as indicated previously, reducing the number of workers was not reported as a common practice implemented in factories. Other issues mentioned by a few employers included a loss of productivity due to workers having to wear masks and more complicated management of breaks and lunch times.

8. Opportunities for improvement in occupational safety and health

Considerable efforts were put into developing and adopting measures to support workplaces in the garment supply chain in Myanmar to prevent exposure to COVID-19. The research nevertheless identified shortcomings that highlight opportunities for improvement in OSH management in factories and in the national OSH system. Shortcomings included gaps in coordination between institutions responsible for monitoring compliance with OSH measures in workplaces and a shortage of resources available for labour inspectors.

The following findings specifically highlight opportunities for improvement in workplace OSH management:

- No measures were taken to address other OSH issues arising from the pandemic which were identified by respondents, such as mental health and harassment. Employers indicated that their first priority was the "physical health" of the workers and the ability to reopen the factory, and that other considerations were not addressed during this emergency period.
- Gaps were identified in communications with workers and in the provision of information and training to workers.
- While factories implemented measures to prevent the spread of the virus in workplaces following the publication of government directives, according to the participants who were interviewed for this case study, challenges arose in particular with ensuring physical distancing. Insufficient provision of PPE and hygiene-related supplies (disinfectant gels) were also reported.
- It also appeared that while measures were developed for specific categories of workers who were part of high-risk groups such as older workers and those with pre-existing health conditions, these were not implemented in all workplaces.
- Most workers reported a timid or non-existent role for bipartite workplace OSH committees in factories. Either these existed but did not function effectively to establish a presence and demonstrate definitive support to workplace prevention practices or workers were not aware if they existed in their factory.[13]
- The absence of long-term plans for emergency prevention, preparedness and response also shows gaps in OSH management systems at the workplace level.[14] No participant interviewed alluded to the existence of any clear, OSH-related, long-term emergency preparedness and response plan.

13 In Myanmar, the OSH law would require once enacted and enforced, that employers shall: (a) appoint a person in-charge for occupational safety and health to closely supervise safety and health of workers; (b) form an occupational safety and health committee comprising equal number of employer and worker representatives.

14 For more details on OSH management systems, see: ILO-OSH, Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, 2001.

9. Conclusion

COVID-19 has severely affected the garment global supply chain in Myanmar with consequences for both manufacturers and workers. Manufacturers faced a contraction in global demand for finished products while two distinct lockdowns led to factory closures, production disruptions, layoffs, reduced working hours and reduced income for workers.

While considerable efforts were made to develop and implement measures to support workplaces, shortcomings were also identified, including in coordination of the response, particularly during the first lockdown. Experience gained over time appeared to have led to improvements after the second lockdown, according to those who participated in the study.

Stakeholders in Myanmar's garment global supply chain are facing new critical challenges since the military takeover and ongoing limits posed by the fluid COVID-19 situation.

Nevertheless, the findings from this research remain important in highlighting areas for improvement in the continued response to the pandemic, and for OSH improvements in the garment global supply chain. These include improvements in the national OSH system and for established and functioning OSH management systems and bipartite OSH committees in factories, reinforcing findings from previous research conducted on the drivers and constraints for OSH improvement in Myanmar (Contri and Infante-Villarroel 2019; Ryan and Htay 2021). Such improvements would contribute to fill the gaps identified in the research with regards to other OSH issues arising from the pandemic, communication with and provision of training and information to workers, compliance with OSH preventive measures and emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

References

Anner, Mark. 2020. "Abandoned? The Impact of Covid-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of the Global Garment Supply Chains". Research Report. Center for Global Workers' Rights in association with the Workers' Rights Consortium. https://www. researchgate. net/publication/340460592_Abandoned_The_Impact_of_Covid-19_on_Workers_and_Businesses_at_the_Bottom_of_Global_Garment_Supply_Chains.

Baker McKenzie. 2020. "Myanmar: COVID-19-Further Update on Workplace Inspections in Myanmar". 5 May 2020. https://www. lexology. com/library/detail. aspx?g=203fec85-26ab-4cec-85d7-6725d4e8ef60.

Contri, Bernado, and Mariana Infante-Villarroel. 2019. *Occupational Safety and Health in the Myanmar Garment Sector: Market Assessment, OSH Risk Assessment and Business Case Analysis.* ILO. https://live-vzf. pantheonsite. io/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Market-assessment-OSH-Risk-assessment-and-business-care-analysis-on-occupational-safety-and-health-in-the-Myanmar-garment-sector.pdf

EuroCham Myanmar. 2019. "Garment Guide 2020" (Yangon).

EuroCham Myanmar. 2020. Guidelines for Prevention and Control of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Factories, Workshops and Establishments (Version 5.0, Updated as of 9/10/2020). Unofficial Translation

European Union External Action Service.2020. ''COVID-19 rapid response: EU creates €5 million emergency fund for Myanmar garment workers''. https://eeas. europa. eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/77355/covid-19-rapid-response-eu-creates-%E2%82%AC5-million-emergency-fund-myanmar-garment-workers_en

ILO. 2020. *COVID-19 and the Textiles, Clothing, Leather and Footwear Industries*. ILO Sectoral Brief, 8 April 2020. https://www. ilo. org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_741344. pdf

ILO. 2021. *Employment in Myanmar Since the Military Takeover: A Rapid Impact Assessment*, ILO Brief, July 2021. https://www. ilo. org/yangon/publications/WCMS_814681/lang--en/index. htm

IndustriAll Global Union. 2020. "Workers in Cambodia and Myanmar Feel Coronavirus Fall-Out". *Just Style*, 13 March 2020. https://www. just-style. com/news/workers-in-cambodia-and-myanmar-feel-coronavirus-fall-out/

LIFT (Livelihood and Food Security Fund).2020. "LIFT And DSW Announce USD9 Million In COVID-19 Cash Support To Mothers, Pregnant Women And Social Pension Beneficiaries". 27 May 2020. https://www. lift-fund. org/en/covid-19/announcements-covid-19-news/lift-and-dsw-announce-usd9-million-covid-19-cash-support.

McKinsey & Company. 2020. "The State of Fashion 2020 Coronavirus Update". Industry Report.

Mengistu, Andualem, Pramila Krishnan, Koen Maaskant, Christian Johannes Meyer, and Eduard Krkoska. 2020. "Firms in Ethiopia's Industrial Parks: COVID-19 Impacts, Challenges and Government Response". Policy Note, 24 September 2020. World Bank Group. https://openknowledge. worldbank. org/bitstream/handle/10986/34573/Firms-in-Ethiopia-s-Industrial-Parks-COVID-19-Impacts-Challenges-and-Government-Response. pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

MGMA (Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association). 2020. "Position Paper 2020". https://www. myanmargarments. org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Position-Paper-English. pdf

Paton, E. 2021. "Myanmar's Defiant Garment Workers Demand That Fashion Pay Attention". *The New York Times*, 12 March 2021.

President's Office, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. 2020. "Notification No. 53/2020. " 30 March 2020.

Ryan, Kallene, and Aung Myaing Htay. 2021. *Vision Zero Fund Myanmar: Outcomes and Practices Assessment 2017–2020*. ILO. https://www. ilo. org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-yangon/documents/publication/wcms_773057. pdf.

Wai, Kyaw San. 2020. "Myanmar and COVID-19". The Diplomat, 1 May 2020. https://thediplomat. com/2020/05/myanmar-and-covid-19/.

WHO. 2020. "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), Update as at 4 March 2020". https://www. who. int/myanmar/news/detail/04-03-2020-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-update-as-at-4-march-2020.

Annex

Annex I

Myanmar factory checklist

Name of factory _____ Date of inspection _____

Address of factory _____

Sr.	Compliance measures	Yes	No	Remark
1.	**Stay at home**			
	Is there any arrangement to work from home for employees who can work from home?			
2.	**Physical distancing**			
*	Mark on floor to ensure 6 feet apart			
*	Arrange to wear face shield or plastic barrier or ensure there is no face-to- face situation if it is impossible to have a distance of 6 feet apart			
*	Do not change assignment of employees from each work shift			
	Arrange to have different working hours for employees from each work shift			
	Arrange to have different break times for employees from each work shift			
*3.	**Instruct employees to wear surgical masks and gloves and provide enough surgical masks and gloves**			
4.	**Staff sickness**			
	Arrange to get treatment at Health Department and not to enter workplace for employees who have symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever and cough and other health problems (if there is an arrangement, describe how it is arranged in the remark)			
*	Clearly describe the information in the instructions of the Ministry of Health and Sports not to enter workplace			
*	Arrangement to report to respective supervisor in charge of factory and continue to report to Health Department if employee or one of the family members of employee is sick			
5.	**Transportation**			
*	Arrange shuttle bus seats with name tags			
*	Provide hand sanitizer, tissues and surgical masks on ferries			
6.	**Entrance/exit**			
*	Provide non-touch thermometer or thermal scanner at entrance/exit of workplace (three non-touch thermometers for 500 employees, five non-touch thermometers for 1,000 employees)			
	Provide personal protective equipment (mask, gloves, apron, face shield) for the staff who check temperature			
	Arrange not to be crowded at entrance/exit when staff arrive at work and leave work and to maintain a distance of 6 feet apart			
*	Assign supervisors to check attendance of employees without signing on paper in a crowd or using a fingerprint scanner			

	Make a contact list with addresses and phone numbers of employees from factory/office			
7.	**Hygiene**			
*	Provide enough sinks that are 6 feet apart (1 sink per 50 people) (one of which the tap can be used by pressing with legs) **a.** Entrance/exit of workplace **b.** Workplace **c.** Rest area and dining room **d.** Toilet			
*	Arrange necessary support to wash hands properly (soap, water, hand sanitizer, tissues)			
	Put posters of measures to wash hands properly at every place where employees wash hands			
8.	**Cleanliness and disinfection**			
	Provide enough trash bins, arrange proper garbage collection and disposal system and record **a.** Toilet **b.** Workplace			
	Arrange to dispose of one-use personal protective equipment systematically and record			
	Arrange to clean personal protective equipment which is not one-use and record (if there is an arrangement, describe how it is arranged in the remark)			
*	Is there enough 70% alcohol to sanitize equipment that is used daily by employees and metal surfaces that are touched by employees?			
*	Is there enough 0.1% hypochlorite solution or liquid soap and water to sanitize floors? (Is there any knowledge about measures and usage instructions if 0.1% hypochlorite solution is used to sanitize?)			
9.	**Meals and rest**			
	Employees bring their own lunch boxes and water bottles			
	Factory arranges meals (If yes, describe how personal hygiene of kitchen staff and their health issues are arranged in the remark)			
	Arrange to eat or rest 6 feet apart in dining room and rest areas			
	Arrange to wash hands properly in dining room and rest areas			
10.	**General**			
	Arrange to have good ventilation in work places			
	If air conditioners are used, arrange to clean filters often and record			

VISION ZERO FUND

International Labour Organization
Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH)

Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

ilo.org/vzf
vzf@ilo.org

Current & Past Donors of the Vision Zero Fund

Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
This project is funded by the European Union
Sweden Sverige
Norad
SIEMENS Ingenuity for life
Liberté • Égalité • Fraternité RÉPUBLIQUE FRANCAISE
UKaid from the British people

This report is a product of the Vision Zero Fund project "Filling data and knowledge gaps on OSH in GSCs to strengthen the model of shared responsibility". This document was produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

This project is funded by the European Union

International Labour Organization | SAFETY + HEALTH FOR ALL

Vision Zero Fund is part of Safety + Health for All, an ILO flagship programme building a culture of safe, healthy work.

ISBN 978-92-2-036204-4
9 789220 362044