



# COVID-19 Response in the Garment Sector

## Funding Opportunities

### Impact of the Pandemic on Women Workers

**The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on garment workers is devastating.** Women workers are disproportionately impacted, facing an increased burden of unpaid care work, additional barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV). Those who continue to work in factories are at significant risk as social distancing is impossible during their workday and employers may not be implementing appropriate healthy and safety measures. Those who fall sick may not have insurance or sick pay coverage and will struggle to access services in sourcing countries where medical infrastructure and public health systems were likely weak even before the pandemic. And those who lose their jobs are facing months without pay, have few or no savings to fall back on and extremely limited options for generating income to support themselves and their families.

### Opportunities to Support CARE'S Work

CARE has been working in the garment industry for over 20 years. With an organizational focus on transformative programming for women and girls, and extensive experience with rapid gender analyses and humanitarian response, we are now focused on protecting the rights and needs of women in the garment sector across our country portfolio in Asia and Africa.<sup>1</sup> Our response efforts, for which we are seeking additional funding, focus on supporting women workers to adopt COVID-19 prevention strategies, to access support services – including health but also psycho-social, sexual health and GBV services – and receive much needed financial support for themselves and their families, including through cash transfers. **It is critical that we respond to the immediate needs of women workers, but also lay the groundwork for recovery.** CARE is responding in the following ways:

#### 1) COVID-19 Prevention Strategies

Garment producing countries in the Global South are still in the **early stages of prevention and containment of the virus.** The impact of further spread will be devastating in contexts which already suffer from weak health systems; inconsistent access to critical water, sanitation and hygiene services; and lack of government infrastructure to consistently enforce preventative measures. Workers are at risk in factories, during their commutes and in their communities – including the many thousands who are travelling back to rural areas following suspension from the factories:

- Development of **new training materials and guidelines on preventative and reactive measures** to the virus which are contextualized to local conditions (e.g. local language, literacy rates, use of common terminologies, myth-busting)
- Disseminating **information, education and communication (IEC) materials in factories and communities** through posters, sessions, videos, audio announcements, traditional and social media
- Provision of soap and hand sanitizer and **establishing hand-washing stations in factories**
- Provision of **personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitation and hygiene kits** for workers and their family members



### COVID-19 Rapid Situation Analysis - Bangladesh

Surveys with 255 women factory workers in Bangladesh have found that:

- 35% feel uncertain about their salary and 28% fear losing their jobs
- 39% face food shortages or crisis
- Worker-requested supports to meet their essential needs: cash transfer (50%), hygiene products (44%), adequate food including for children (43%), medicine & treatment (30%)
- 47% indicated they will try to find work in other sectors if they are facing unemployment; those looking for new jobs will require support for job placements, cash assistance and job-related training

## 2) Addressing Increased Risks Faced by Women

Women constitute the majority of the garment sector workforce and they will be **disproportionately affected by the pandemic**. Women workers will face an increased risk of gender-based violence; a larger burden of unpaid care work in their homes; barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health rights; reduced access to sanitation and women's hygiene materials; and a higher likelihood of food insecurity.

- Adapting and disseminating **IEC materials on gender-based violence and sexual, reproductive and maternal health** in factories and communities.
- Delivering and supporting linkage to **critical information and support services for women workers**, including: COVID-19 information and health services, psychosocial support services, sexual and reproductive health services, and case management and referrals GBV support services.
- **Capacity building and provision of PPE** to frontline health workers and service deliverers during the pandemic

## 3) Mitigating Economic Impact on Workers and Supporting Recovery

The **COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impacts on women's livelihoods** – in Bangladesh alone, more than one million workers have already been fired or temporarily suspended from work, up to 80% were sent home without partial wages or severance pay.<sup>2</sup> Thousands more will be facing similar situations in other countries in the coming weeks.

- Direct cash assistance to provide **subsistence allowances equivalent to a minimum wage for women** whose livelihood and family income have been affected by COVID-19. Allowances support workers to pay for rent, food, medical expenses and other core living expenses for themselves and their families.
- **Targeted upskilling, reskilling and entrepreneurship opportunities**, based on country-specific labour market needs assessments to enable women to respond to changes in the labour market and access alternative livelihoods.
- Adaptation of the [EKATA \(Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformation Action\)](#) model, with remote participation of women workers to discuss and take action on health and nutrition, COVID-19 prevention measures, problem-solving and gender-based violence. EKATA groups will provide a space for sharing and collective problem solving, **ensuring women workers have a voice and play an active role in response and recovery**.

## The Continued Role of Brands, Suppliers and Governments

CARE and broader civil society will play our part to support workers during the pandemic, but **now more than ever it is vital that brands, suppliers and governments act to meet their obligations to protect the rights of workers**. The effectiveness of CARE's response relies on brands committing to maintain their existing orders; suppliers meeting legal obligations to their workers; and governments providing effective social protection schemes and services – including health, gender-based violence, and sexual and reproductive health services.

## Where Can I Find More Information on CARE's Response to the Pandemic?

- [Made by Women – Dignified Work for Garment Workers](#)
- [What is the impact of COVID-19 on the global garment industry?](#)
- [COVID-19 and the garment industry: Protect workers, transform the industry](#)
- [Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19](#)
- [COVID-19 Updates from CARE](#)
- [5 Reasons Why Women and Girls Are Particularly Vulnerable to COVID-19](#)

<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup> Mark Anner, March 27, 2020, Abandoned? The Impact of COVID-19 on Workers and Businesses at the Bottom of Global Garment Supply Chains, Research Report, PennState Center for Global Workers' Rights