

19 February 2018

H&M statement on the report “Labour Without Liberty - Female Migrant Workers in Bangalore's Garment Industry”

We welcome this report and are genuinely concerned about the challenges within the Indian textile industry that it draws attention to. We share the concerns raised in the report and we are sorry if our answers to the organizations behind the report were perceived as too general or brief. We are very committed to our continuous work both around the labour conditions in textile factories and living conditions at hostels, but at the same time aware of and frustrated over that the work to identify, push and understand how we and other brands can and should influence to make lasting change is not moving fast enough.

The report clearly shows there is a need for improved recruitment processes and a clearer communication making all inter-state migrant workers understand their rights and responsibilities. Another challenge is the language barrier between workers and management at the workplace, making the interstate migrant workers more exposed than other workers. We are also aware of the vulnerability of textile workers living at hostels. This is the reason why we last year reached out to suppliers in India to reinforce our expectation that the “Guidance for Migrant Women Workers in Hostels” is followed, developed by the brands group in India (BEWG) together with trade unions, NGO’s and manufacturers. The guide aims at providing safe and healthy accommodation to migrant workers. H&M inspects all hostels provided by our suppliers to make sure they meet expected standards. We inspect the premises and conduct interviews with the workers living there. We also check the buildings from a general building maintenance perspective, the cleanliness of the premises as well as what kind of safety restrictions the workers have to comply with.

But even if the hostels fulfill our requirements as well as national law, there can still be challenges that need to be handled. One such challenge concerns the balance between keeping the workers safe and the freedom of movement. Last year we had discussions with several suppliers and their hostels about the curfew restrictions for female workers during their Sunday off and can now see changes taking place. The women now have full freedom to leave hostels as they please during daytime on Sundays, but there will still be checks when coming and going for safety reasons. Since the interview material used in the report refers back to 2016, and activities addressing this have been performed during 2017, some changes such as this might not have been recognized.

Since we are aware of and concerned by challenges connected to living conditions in the Bangalore garment factory hostels, and working conditions at factories, we will arrange a workshop in the beginning of 2018, together with Ethical Trade Initiative, where the trade unions GLU and GATWU also are invited, to discuss updated and improved hostel guide lines, how to prevent and address sexual harassment and the assimilation of interstate migrant workers. One goal is to make sure suppliers provide the migrant workers with supportive services in order to ensure their concerns are addressed, both connected to the workplace and the living conditions in general.

Sincerely,
Jonah Wigerhäll
Sustainability Business Expert