



Forced Labor Vulnerability and Related Labor Rights Concerns for Bangladeshi Workers in the Garment Sector of Mauritius

Findings from interviews with returned Bangladeshi migrant workers

October 2022

Acknowledgements:

This report was made possible through the generous support of the United States Department of Labor's Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB). The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Department of Labor. The report was written by Jennifer A. Cook, Ph.D., who served as Lead Researcher on the report. Field research and worker interviews were conducted by Bangladesh-based NGO Sheva Nari O Shishu Kallyan Kendra. Desk research was supported by Sofia Ruiz. The field research team was led by Saida-Samara Khan and included Mohammed Manirul Islam and Mohammad Nuruzzaman. Max Travers served as the Project Manager, while Erin Klett provided oversight and management of the broader initiative.

This research would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Sheva's field research team in Bangladesh. Verité would like to thank the workers who shared their time, experiences, and perspectives with researchers.



Funding is provided by the United States Department of Labor under cooperative agreement number IL-34208. 100% percentage of the total costs of the project or program is financed with USG federal funds, for a total of \$3,725,000 dollars. This material does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the United States Department of Labor, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the United States Government.

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Verité, Inc.

44 Belchertown Road

Amherst, MA 01002 USA

verite.org

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Executive Summary

The garment sector of Mauritius is a significant destination for migrant workers¹ from Bangladesh, who work in large numbers in the sector primarily on temporary work visas. There is some evidence to suggest that forced labor vulnerability is present in the garment sector of Mauritius, including among Bangladeshi migrant workers, but little credible information is available to confirm the nature or prevalence of this labor risk in the sector.

This report presents the findings from a series of interviews with returned Bangladeshi migrant workers with recent experience working in the garment sector of Mauritius. The interviews were conducted as part of a project led by the International Labour Organization with partners Verité and NORC at the University of Chicago. The goal of this project is to develop robust and replicable approaches to collecting and analyzing data on vulnerability to forced labor, as the basis for building evidence-based interventions. The project seeks to contribute to the harmonization of analysis of forced labor phenomena, through the use of a framework for analyzing forced labor vulnerability published by the International Conference of Labor Statisticians in 2018.²

The Bangladesh-Mauritius corridor for work in the garment sector of Mauritius was chosen because of the documented presence of vulnerable migrant workers in the sector, as well as evidence of labor vulnerability and a need for further detailed information about the types of labor risks faced by migrant workers.

Between October 2021 and February 2022, Verité conducted research among Bangladeshi individuals with past employment experience in the garment sector overseas, to explore the nature of labor vulnerabilities for migrant workers in the sector. Verité conducted interviews with 18 individuals, a majority of whom had returned from working in the garment sector of Mauritius within three years of the interview date.³ Due to the small number of worker interviews and the lack of a scientific sampling strategy, this sample cannot be taken to be statistically representative at a national or sectoral level. However, using qualitative research methods, this research offers detailed descriptions of the experiences of a group of vulnerable Bangladeshi workers in the garment sector of Mauritius.

Findings on Forced Labor Vulnerability

Verité analyzed respondents' employment experiences according to a set of indicators of forced labor prescribed by the ILO.⁴ This research did not intend to make a determination as to whether individual interview subjects were in an actual condition of forced labor. Rather, the research sought to understand the nature and characteristics of forced labor vulnerability in the interview population. If an interview subject was found to exhibit one or more indicators of forced labor, Verité interpreted this to mean that the interview subject was experiencing forced labor vulnerability.¹

¹ As described in the main body of the report, employing an indicator-based approach to assessing forced labor vulnerability is valuable because it highlights underlying issues driving forced labor risk, generating actionable insights that can be used by the private sector, government, and other stakeholders to develop specific risk management programs and policies. The indicator approach also makes impact tracking easier by facilitating measurement of the nature and characteristics of risk in a specific context over time (or even the prevalence of specific indicators), without necessarily requiring documentation of the overall prevalence of forced labor cases within the broader population. For all these reasons, the ILO framework for understanding and assessing forced labor through an indicator or risk factor lens is central to Verité's overall approach to the issue.

Following are the main findings from this research:

- Almost all respondents were charged fees by labor agents in Bangladesh as a condition of obtaining employment in Mauritius. Fees ranged from USD 445 to USD 2,839, with an average of USD 1,757 (roughly 3.5 months of the average reported salary).
- Almost all respondents incurred significant debt in order to pay recruitment fees. The average loan amount was USD 1,401, and the highest amount borrowed was USD 3,085.⁵ The total loan amounts taken on by respondents amounted to about 4.5 months of their salaries on average (comparing their individual reported debts and salaries).⁶ Respondents indicated it took between three and 24 months to fully pay off their debts. Two respondents had outstanding debts related to their recruitment at the time of the interview. In general, respondents reported that their salaries were highly variable and sometimes insufficient to pay back their debts. Respondents indicated that consequences for failure to pay back their debts could include the loss of collateral and reputational damage, and in a few cases, the threat of physical violence.
- Respondents indicated that they were generally unable to review their contracts prior to signing or departing for Mauritius. Even though the terms of the job were often described to them by labor agents, many respondents reported that the reality of their working and living conditions were often different from what they had been promised. Several respondents reported feeling that they had been actively deceived by labor agents during the recruitment process. The salaries they were promised during recruitment were often higher than what they were actually paid on arrival.
- Most respondents indicated a very limited understanding of how they were paid and how and why deductions were made to their salaries. Many respondents said they participated in some kind of savings program⁷ but had little understanding of how it worked, and many reported being unable to recover the funds at the end of their employment term in Mauritius.
- Respondents felt unable to refuse overtime hours or work they felt was unsafe. Several respondents reported working hours in excess of Mauritian legal overtime limits. Several respondents reported being harassed or scolded by their employers when they attempted to lodge complaints or ask questions about how their pay was calculated.
- Several respondents experienced serious illness while in Mauritius and felt that they received inadequate medical care from their employers, despite having been promised during the recruitment process that they would receive medical treatment free of cost, and despite the fact that medical care at Mauritian public hospitals is free.
- Respondents almost unanimously reported that they could not end their employment contracts early without financial or other penalty (including loss of owed wages or benefits or loss of personal documents).

The chart below outlines the ICLS indicators of forced labor that were identified as being present in the interview population, based on qualitative descriptions of working conditions experienced. The number of respondents experiencing each indicator is indicated in order of frequency. As noted above, these

indicators are taken as evidence of forced labor *vulnerability*, not as evidence of actual cases of forced labor.

Indicators of Forced Labor Vulnerability Present in the Interview Population

Indicators of Involuntary Work	
# Respondents	Indicator
Many	work with no or limited freedom to terminate work contract
	situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person's consent
Some	abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer
	work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment
	work in degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party
Few	work with very low or no wages
Indicators of threat or menace of penalty	
# Respondents	Indicator
Many	debt bondage or manipulation of debt
	withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits)
Some	withholding of wages or other promised benefits
	abuse of workers' vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation
	restrictions on workers' movement
Few	threats or violence against workers or workers' families and relatives, or close associates

In addition to these indicators of forced labor, several other general labor rights concerns were identified, including:

- Discriminatory treatment of women workers and pregnant workers, including mandatory pregnancy testing during recruitment and by employer in Mauritius, as well as employer dismissal and repatriation of pregnant workers
- Ineffective grievance mechanisms
- Targeting and harassment of workers, including via threats of dismissal and deportation, or workers who submit grievances or lodge complaints
- Inadequate access to medical treatment for seriously ill workers
- Punitive suspensions and wage deductions (for example, workers who missed one day of work were sometimes marked absent for multiple days, resulting in wage withholding for time they actually worked)

These research findings suggest the presence of forced labor risk in this migration corridor. Further research and engagement on forced labor vulnerability and other labor rights issues facing migrant workers in the garment sector of Mauritius is recommended. While further recommendations are beyond the scope and mandate of this report, efforts to address the underlying causes of forced labor

vulnerability in the Mauritius garment sector will clearly need to engage these significant risks. Verité hopes that the findings herein will provide a platform of understanding from which concrete actions can be taken by government, business, and civil society stakeholders alike to combat the abuses suffered by migrant workers in the garment sector.

Introduction

The garment sector of Mauritius is a significant destination for migrant workers⁸ from Bangladesh, who work in large numbers in the sector primarily on temporary work visas. There is some evidence⁹ to suggest that forced labor vulnerability is present in the garment sector of Mauritius, including among Bangladeshi migrant workers, but little credible information is available to confirm the nature or prevalence of this labor risk in the sector.

This report presents the findings from interviews with 18 returned Bangladeshi migrant workers with recent experience working in the garment sector of Mauritius. In addition to interviews with workers, Verité conducted consultations with a series of international stakeholders.¹⁰ The interviews were conducted as part of a project led by the International Labour Organization with partners Verité and NORC at the University of Chicago. The goal of this project is to develop robust and replicable approaches to collecting and analyzing data on forced labor as the basis for building evidence-based interventions. The project seeks to contribute to the harmonization of analysis of forced labor phenomena, through the use of a framework for forced labor measurement published by the International Conference of Labor Statisticians in 2018.¹¹

The Bangladesh-Mauritius corridor for work in the garment sector of Mauritius was chosen because of the documented presence of vulnerable migrant workers in the sector, as well as evidence of forced labor vulnerability and a need for further detailed information about the types of labor risks faced by migrant workers.

This report is qualitative in nature. The results are not statistically representative and are not meant to be interpreted as such. However, using qualitative research methods, this research offers detailed descriptions of the experiences of a group of vulnerable Bangladeshi workers in the garment sector of Mauritius.

Garment Manufacturing in Mauritius

Garment manufacturing in Mauritius is primarily export-oriented and the country has been designated as an “EPZ” since the 1970’s.¹² Most Mauritian-made apparel products are exported to Europe, the U.S., and South Africa. The sector is very small in scale compared to some of the world’s garment producers.

Mauritian government data indicates that as of September 2021 there were 23 textile/yarns/fabrics producers and 84 apparel producers in Mauritius employing 22,632 workers.¹³ Mauritian garment producers are seen as important business partners by many global brands who appreciate their vertical integration and high value-added processes.¹⁴

Despite its relatively small size in global comparison, the sector plays a crucial role in the Mauritian economy. Articles of apparel and clothing represented more than 30 percent of Mauritius’ total domestic exports in 2020 (the second largest share, outranked only by exports of food and live animals).¹⁵ The Gross Value Added of the textile industry in Mauritius in 2020 was MUR 10.89B (roughly USD 245M),¹⁶ approximately ¼ of the total Gross Value Added of the manufacturing sector.¹⁷ The total value of trade in articles of apparel and clothing in 2020 was MUR 15.1B (roughly USD 337M), a decline from MUR 18.7B (roughly USD 422M) in 2019.¹⁸ According to one sector expert interviewed by Verité, one garment manufacturing company is the nation’s single largest employer.¹⁹

Historically, women have made up a majority of the workforce in export-oriented industries in Mauritius.²⁰ As of September 2021, according to government statistics, the garment sector workforce is majority male, though the proportions differ significantly in different subsectors within textile/garment production.²¹ In wearing apparel, in September 2021, 11,101 workers (56 percent) were male and 8,698 (44 percent) were female, and in textile, yarn and fabrics, a large majority (2,429 workers, or 86 percent) were male.²²

The labor force has also shifted over time from primarily domestic workers to migrant workers. Garment manufacturers have become highly dependent upon significant flows of migrant workers facilitated through the Mauritian government’s temporary worker program, which issues visas to sewing machine operators and other workers requested by manufacturers. In September 2021, roughly 58 percent of workers employed by export-oriented wearing apparel enterprises were migrant²³ workers.²⁴ Seventy percent of migrant workers employed in wearing apparel enterprises were men.²⁵

No publicly available data was found regarding the specific countries of origin of expatriate workers in the apparel sector. Historically workers were recruited from China, India, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar.²⁶ Desk research and stakeholder consultations conducted by Verité suggest that in recent years Bangladeshi migrants have come to make up a significant percentage (perhaps the majority) of the garment sector workforce. There are also significant numbers of Malagasy workers and smaller numbers of workers from the other three historical sending countries still actively employed in the sector.²⁷

Mauritian government data indicates Bangladeshi workers constitute the largest proportion of overall work permit holders (including all economic sectors) in the country, with Bangladeshi men in particular holding 44% of all active/valid work permits as of October 2020.²⁸ Bangladeshi government data shows that the number of Bangladeshi migrants traveling to Mauritius for work increased dramatically between 2004 and 2019.²⁹ Beginning in 2020, COVID-related restrictions resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of Bangladeshis traveling to Mauritius for work (see graph below).³⁰ Just 215

Bangladeshis are reported to have traveled to Mauritius for work in 2021 (a dramatic drop from the peak number of migrant workers in 2019 (7,576 workers) and the 2020 total of 2,014 migrants). Numbers seem to be on the rise again for 2022 – as of February 2022, 496 Bangladeshis had reportedly departed for work in Mauritius.³¹

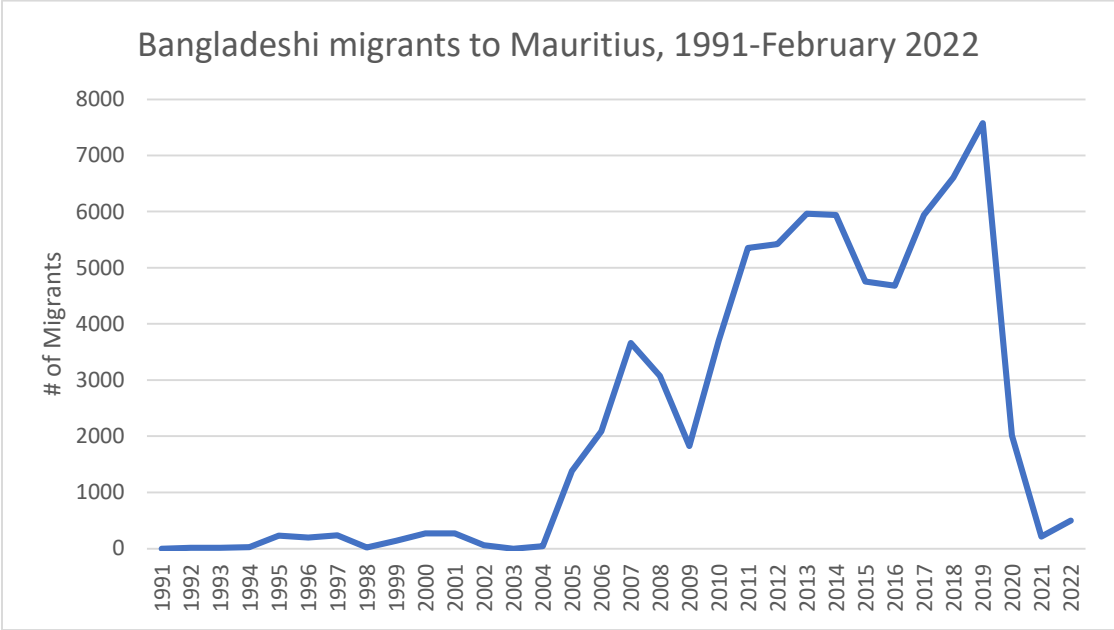


Figure 1: Bangladeshi Migrants to Mauritius, per Bangladeshi government data, 1991-February 2022³²

Forced labor vulnerability and other labor rights issues in the Mauritian garment sector
 There is some existing evidence of forced labor vulnerability in the garment sector of Mauritius. According to the US State Department TIP (Trafficking in Persons) Reports³³, ten adult Bangladeshi victims of labor trafficking were identified by the Mauritian government in 2018 and 2019. The nine victims identified in 2018 were migrant workers employed under conditions of forced labor in the textile industry. The 2020 TIP Report indicates that NGOs have reported that migrant workers in Mauritius may lack freedom of movement outside of working hours, and that employer-provided housing facilities are often secured with fences and security guards.³⁴ The report also suggests that some companies actively worked to deny workers’ the right to petition/protest, and in some cases used secret informants to identify and penalize the leaders of workers’ rights protests (to cancel contracts and deport them).³⁵ It also indicates that some foreign workers entered Mauritius with incomplete contracts, or with contracts that were not translated into a language they understood, despite the fact that the Mauritian Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT) is required to approve all employment contracts before migrants enter the country.³⁶

The most recent TIP Report (2021) describes the heightened vulnerability of migrant workers, especially Bangladeshi-origin workers, due to labor recruitment mechanisms.

“Employers operating small- and medium-sized businesses employ migrant workers, primarily from Bangladesh, who have been recruited through private recruitment intermediaries, usually former migrant workers now operating as recruiting agents in their country of origin; labor trafficking cases are more common in these enterprises

than in larger businesses, which recruit directly without the use of intermediaries. Despite Mauritian law prohibiting the practice, employers routinely retain migrant workers' passports to prevent them from changing jobs, enhancing the vulnerability to forced labor."³⁷

The 2020 US State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices also cites trade union reports of forced labor among migrant workers in Mauritius, including cases of "passport confiscation, underpayment of wages, substandard living conditions, lack of clearly defined work titles, denial of meal allowances, and deportation."³⁸ (See also reports by IndustriALL and news coverage of local labor union activists in Mauritius.³⁹)

NGO and news media reports have also documented a series of forced labor and other labor rights concerns:

- Deception in recruitment about pay and working conditions⁴⁰
- Wage withholding⁴¹
- Inhospitable living conditions in employer-provided housing (including lack of running water/electricity, insufficient toilet facilities)⁴²
- Punitive use of deportation as a mechanism of worker control⁴³
- Lack of access to labor unions, including employer anti-union activities⁴⁴
- Threats and intimidation of workers⁴⁵
- Withholding of passports by employers⁴⁶

Despite ample anecdotal evidence of generalized forced labor vulnerability, there are few credible sources of verifiable information that confirm the existence of actual cases of forced labor. Furthermore, little research has been done about the nature and characteristics of forced labor vulnerability for different groups of workers across the sector. This report draws on interviews with Bangladeshi workers about their experiences working in the Mauritian garment sector to analyze forced labor vulnerabilities and other labor rights concerns in the sector.

Methodology:

Field Research Process

Interviews conducted in two field research periods, the first in October-November 2021 and the second in January-February 2022. Interviews took between one and two hours, and all but one interview was conducted with a single participant (in one case, two participants were interviewed simultaneously).

Field researchers with Verité’s Bangladesh-based NGO partner organization Sheva Nari O Shishu Kallyan Kendra (SHEVA) conducted the field research in consultation with the Verité project team. SHEVA field researchers used existing connections to communities in and around Dhaka where garment manufacturing is present, given prior knowledge that labor brokers and agencies seeking workers for international garment factories tend to recruit individuals with prior experience in garment manufacturing. SHEVA and Verité also established new links to other community organizations, including OKUP, with known involvement with Mauritian-bound Bangladeshi garment sector workers, to facilitate participant recruitment. From the initial contacts with returned workers from Mauritius, field researchers used purposive and “snowball” sampling to recruit additional respondents. Seventeen respondents were interviewed in Bangladesh, and one respondent who was still living in Mauritius was interviewed via phone. All participants in Bangladesh were given BDT 500 (USD 5.80) upon completion of the interview as compensation for their participation.⁴⁷

Field researchers used a semi-structured qualitative interview tool to conduct interviews with workers in Bangla. If respondents consented to being audio-recorded, an audio-recording was made and later erased per the human subjects protections protocol. In a few cases, respondents refused recording, or the audio quality was poor due to ambient noise interference, so field researchers took detailed handwritten notes. All notes were handled and later disposed of per the human subjects protection protocol. Names and identifying information of participants was recorded separately from the interview notes and later deleted.

More detail about the research methodology, including discussion of human subjects protocols, research tools, and data analysis, can be found in Appendix 1.

Analytical Framework

Use of ILO’s Forced Labor Indicator Framework to Identify Risk and Vulnerability

International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 29 defines forced labor as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.” To facilitate analysis and measurement of forced labor, the International Council of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) published the *Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour* in 2018.⁴⁸ The *Guidelines* outline a series of “forced labor indicators,” or factors which, in various combinations, can result in a condition of forced labor.

The indicators, which are divided into two categories (pertaining to involuntary work and threat or menace of penalty, respectively), are:

Indicators of involuntary work*	Indicators of threat and menace of any penalty**
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• unfree recruitment at birth or through transaction such as slavery or bonded labor;• situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• threats or violence against workers or workers’ families and relatives, or close associates;• restrictions on workers’ movement;• debt bondage or manipulation of debt;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer; • work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment; • work with very low or no wages; • work in degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party; • work for other employers than agreed; • work for longer period of time than agreed; and • work with no or limited freedom to terminate work contract <p>*any work taking place without the free and informed consent of the worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • withholding of wages or other promised benefits; • withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits); and • abuse of workers’ vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation. <p>**coercion used to impose work on a worker against a person’s will</p>
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The ILO offers further guidance as to how these indicators can be used for statistical purposes to identify individual cases of forced labor, based upon the number and nature of indicators present for an individual worker.

In this report, Verité has used this indicator framework for a different purpose. This research did not intend to make a determination as to whether individual interview subjects were in an actual condition of forced labor. Rather, the research sought to understand the nature and characteristics of forced labor vulnerability in the interview population. If an interview subject was found to exhibit one or more indicators of forced labor, Verité interpreted this to mean that the interview subject was experiencing forced labor vulnerability.

Employing an indicator-based approach to assessing forced labor vulnerability is valuable because it highlights constituent underlying issues driving forced labor risk, generating actionable insights that can be used by the private sector, government, and other stakeholders to develop specific risk management programs and policies. The indicator approach also makes impact tracking easier by facilitating measurement of the nature and characteristics of risk in a specific context over time (or even the prevalence of specific indicators), without necessarily requiring documentation of the overall prevalence of forced labor cases within the broader population. For all these reasons, the ILO framework for understanding and assessing forced labor through an indicator or risk factor lens is central to Verité’s overall approach to the issue.

As noted above, this report is qualitative in nature. The results are not statistically representative and are not meant to be interpreted as such.

Mauritian Law and Policy on the Recruitment and Employment of Migrant Workers

For the purposes of this analysis, we also compare the conditions and experiences reported by interview respondents to the laws and policies outlined in Mauritian Employment Rights Act of 2019⁴⁹, the national minimum wage⁵⁰, and a recent document published by the Mauritian government entitled “Know Your Rights: A guide for migrant workers in Mauritius.”⁵¹ Where possible, we also address relevant law and policy in Bangladesh governing migrant worker recruitment.⁵² This is done again for the purposes of identifying labor risk or vulnerability, not to identify specific cases of legal infraction.

Other concerns impacting worker vulnerability

In addition to the analysis of forced labor indicators, Verité also analyzed other concerns impacting worker vulnerability to forced labor to provide additional context to the findings. Additionally, Verité analyzed concerns presented by workers regarding their overall health and well-being while employed in the garment sector of Mauritius, including issues related to medical treatment and general quality of life. Although the extrapolation of findings is not possible, the qualitative nature of worker’s experiences can shed light on the complex series of factors that contribute to their overall vulnerability during their labour migration experience in Mauritius.

Respondent Demographics

Interviews were conducted with returned workers currently living in peri-urban areas in and around Dhaka, with one exception of a worker who lived in Mauritius at the time of the research and was interviewed via phone.

The level of formal education of the respondents varied. Most respondents had either completed some elementary education, some high school education, or had graduated junior high. In the sample, women had the lowest levels of education (either no formal education or some elementary school).

Despite their lack of formal education, the respondents were overwhelmingly skilled workers (despite the tendency to refer to manufacturing workers as “unskilled”). Several respondents reported having to pass a demonstration or interview process proving their skills. Some of these demonstrations were held in agency facilities, while others were held at local garment factories after production hours. Fifteen of the 18 respondents had prior experience working with sewing machine equipment in Bangladeshi garment factories, and some had several years of experience and considered themselves experts in their work. Some of those without experience received training in order to develop the requisite skills – one respondent was given a one-month training in a facility in Bangladesh prior to departure for Mauritius.

The date of respondents’ last employment in Mauritius ranged from March 2016 to May 2021. Six had returned within one year of the interview. Nine had returned between one and three years prior to the interview, two returned four to five years prior to the interview, and one returned about five and a half years prior to the interview. The time respondents spent in Mauritius ranged from just under two years to more than 8.5 years.

Time spent in Mauritius	# of respondents ⁵³	Gender
Less than 3 years	4	Three male, one female
3-4 years	4	Three male, one female
5-7 years	5	Four male, one female
8+ years	4	Two male, two female

The four respondents who left before completing three years of work in Mauritius ended their contracts early (visas for Bangladeshi garment manufacturing workers in Mauritius are granted in three-year terms). The rest completed at least one full contract. Some of the respondents renewed their contracts after the first three-year contract was complete and stayed with their employer for another term (typically renewing on an annual basis). A few left Mauritius and returned for a second trip, either with the same employer or with another company on a new three-year contract. Two respondents reported working at small-scale factories with between 5 and 15 total workers. Most of the interviewees’ former

employers had more than 500 workers. Five of the respondents' former employers had 500-1000 workers, seven had 1000-3000 workers, and three had between 8,000 and 10,000 workers.

Findings

Findings are reported for experiences and issues of vulnerability associated with recruitment and conditions once on the job. For each section, general findings are discussed followed by an analysis of any potential vulnerability specifically to forced labor, which is determined based on whether conditions experienced by workers are consistent with specific indicators of forced labor as defined by the ILO. (See a further description above in Analytical Framework: Use of ILO's Forced Labor Indicator Framework to Identify Risk and Vulnerability.)

Forced labor indicators were identified in multiple aspects of both recruitment and employment for Bangladeshi migrant workers in the garment sector of Mauritius.

Vulnerability to forced labor and other labor rights-related vulnerabilities for Bangladeshi migrant workers in Mauritius appears to begin during the recruitment process, where prospective migrants seek work abroad to earn a living to support their families. Lacking local employment opportunities, Bangladeshis are enticed by the desirable terms of employment and pay rates advertised by local labor agents and subagents. These agents often provide prospective recruits with incomplete or inaccurate information during the recruitment process and find that the terms of employment, including the nature of the work, working hours, salaries, and other work-related costs in Mauritius are quite different from what they were promised. Respondents reported having difficulty paying back the large sums they borrowed to pay the high recruitment costs associated with foreign labor migration.

Upon arrival to Mauritius the respondents found unstable schedules with varying hours and varying overtime pay policies. Some were promised overtime pay but were not paid at overtime rates. Others worked hours in excess of Mauritian overtime laws. Several earned wages calculated based on piece-rates that amounted to salaries likely below the Mauritian national minimum wage for employees at export-oriented enterprises. Respondents overall felt they were treated well, but indicated that the food and housing they were provided was often not free of cost, and of poor quality. Overcrowded housing (sometimes over 100 workers to a room) with inadequate washroom facilities were reported by approximately ¼ of respondents.

Perhaps the most serious concern emerged in the respondents' discussion of their ability to terminate their contracts before the prescribed 3-year term. Almost all respondents indicated they could not quit their jobs before the contract ended without incurring some kind of financial or other penalty (including high fees and fines associated with return transportation, loss of personal documents or wages or benefits owed). In several cases respondents described having to "persuade" employers to agree to allow workers to leave their jobs prior to the end of the contract term. Respondents who became seriously ill during their employment in Mauritius found that their employers failed to refer them to appropriate medical care, and in a few cases were made to stay in Mauritius for months without adequate care, sick and unable to work.

Findings are described below. As noted above, this report is qualitative in nature. These findings are not statistically representative and are not meant to be interpreted as such.

Labor Recruitment

Labor Agents and Subagents

All but one respondent worked with one or more labor agents to find work in the Mauritius garment sector. Labor agents and subagents played critical roles in placing Bangladeshi workers in jobs in the Mauritius garment sector. Roles were highly variable and represented a mix of formality and

informality. Some former Bangladeshi garment sector workers in Mauritius transitioned to playing the role of labor broker, placing new Bangladeshi migrant workers in Mauritius garment sector jobs.

Many respondents reported that they initially learned about job opportunities in the Mauritian garment sector through friends, family, and co-workers. These contacts had previous experience as migrant workers in Mauritius or knew others who did, and some had worked with varying degrees of formality as labor agents or subagents themselves. Some respondents learned about jobs in the Mauritian garment sector due to current or past experience working in the garment sector in Bangladesh – sometimes through a suggestion made by a co-worker. In several cases a respondent approached or was approached and recruited directly by a labor agent or subagent. Stakeholder interviews indicate that labor agents and subagents often recruit prospective migrant workers directly from garment-producing areas of Bangladesh because they already have the appropriate skill set for garment work in Mauritius.

Some respondents indicated they were already looking for work abroad at the time of their recruitment, others were approached by someone who introduced the idea of going abroad. Most were spurred by some kind of circumstance at home – a debt, a seemingly dead-end/low-wage job, family problems, or other issues. Virtually all workers reported being drawn to the idea of work in Mauritius by the superior salaries that would be offered to them as foreign contract workers compared to their earning potential in Bangladesh.

The process for getting connected to a specific job in Mauritius varied significantly, with some respondents indicating they were referred by a friend or family member, while others went through (often unregistered/informal) labor subagents (referred to as “dalals”), and others went directly to formal recruitment agencies. In some cases, both agents and subagents were involved in the process of finding the job in Mauritius. The relationships between subagents and agencies appear to vary – some are linked only by informal business relationships where others have a more formalized link (for instance, several respondents reported that a subagent had a desk inside a recruitment agency office but was not a formal employee of the agency).

The specific tasks carried out by agencies, agents, and subagents varied significantly across the respondents’ experiences. In some cases, subagents handled most of the process, where in others, agencies took the lead. The hiring of workers and handling of documents were both managed most often by a formalized agency, though in some scenarios subagents were also involved. In some scenarios, for instance, a subagent brought the worker to the agency in order to complete the necessary paperwork. In some cases, workers were able to carry out and pay for some of the processes (obtaining passports, getting the required medical tests) themselves separately from the intermediaries, while in other cases an intermediary handled all recruitment-related tasks. When it came to arranging for the respondents’ travel to Mauritius, virtually all respondents indicated that this was handled by the formal recruiting agency (subagents played no part). All respondents traveled to Mauritius on sewing machine operator visas. One respondent had left employment in the garment sector and was therefore in violation of his visa status.

In the Bangladesh-Mauritius recruitment corridor context, Verité uses the term “labor agent” to refer to a tier one individual or agency, and “subagent” for individual agents sourcing to tier one. In the Bangladesh context, tier one labor agents and agencies are typically referred to as “labor agencies” or “labor agents,” while subagents may be referred to as “labor brokers” or “field brokers,” often known in Bangla as “dalals.” For additional information about labor recruitment networks in Bangladesh, see: Agunias, Dovelyn R. “Regulating Private Recruitment in the Asia-Middle East Labour Migration Corridor, *IOM, MPI*, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/abor-recruitment.pdf>; Azad, Ashraful, “Recruitment of Migrant Workers in Bangladesh: Elements of Human Trafficking for Labor Exploitation,” *Journal of Human Trafficking* 2019: 5(2),

Two respondents found their most recent employment in Mauritius through a Mauritius-based labor agent they had met on a prior stint in Mauritius in the garment sector (and therefore had no interaction with Bangladesh-based brokers/agencies). The rest of the respondents (16) accessed jobs in Mauritius through Bangladesh-based agents and subagents, who handled the entire recruitment process with little to no apparent involvement of Mauritius-based agents/agencies. As far as the respondents were aware, Bangladeshi agencies coordinated directly with Mauritian employers, rather than coordinating job opportunities through Mauritius-based labor intermediaries.

One respondent who spent nearly eight and a half years in Mauritius shared a wealth of knowledge about the deep transnational ties between labor intermediaries in Bangladesh and Mauritius. According to the respondent, many Bangladeshi workers have married Mauritian citizens since Bangladeshis first began traveling to Mauritius in the mid-1990's. Some of these former foreign contract workers have set up recruitment labor supply businesses in Mauritius, and began recruiting workers from Bangladesh on behalf of Mauritian employers. The respondent explained that many of these Mauritius-based Bangladeshi brokers control the labor supply chain between the two countries, and many have become very wealthy as a result, living transnational lives with homes in both Bangladesh and Mauritius. Independent consultations with one stakeholder with close ties to the Mauritian garment sector also suggested that Bangladeshis with Mauritian spouses are major players in this labor recruitment corridor. Consultations with stakeholders suggest that many large garment factories recruit workers directly in Bangladesh through their own Human Resources departments, so it is possible that these Mauritian-based Bangladeshi labor recruiters work primarily with smaller garment businesses in Mauritius.

Recruitment Fees

Fee charging by labor agents and/or subagents was nearly a universal practice among the respondent population. The fees charged were high – ranging from a cost of USD 445 to USD 2,839, with an average of USD 1,757.

Recruitment fees for outgoing migrant workers are regulated by the Bangladeshi government, and are capped at a limit of BDT 84,000.⁵⁴ In the interviews, all but one respondent indicated they had to pay someone to get their job in Mauritius.⁵⁵ Eleven respondents indicated they paid only a subagent, while four indicated they paid an agency, and two indicated they paid fees to both a labor subagent and an agency. Excluding the one respondent that did not pay any recruitment fees, the total cost of recruitment reportedly paid by respondents ranged from BDT 35,000 (USD 445) to BDT 230,000 (USD 2,839), with an average recruitment cost of approximately BDT 138,000 (USD 1,757).⁵⁶ Thirteen of the 18 respondents indicated they paid more than BDT 84,000, the upper fee limit specified by the Bangladeshi government.⁵⁷

Total Recruitment Cost	# of respondents
BDT 35,000	1
BDT 60,000-70,000	3
BDT 90,000-100,000*	3
BDT 150,000-185,000*	7
BDT 200,000-230,000*	3
*above the legal limit for recruitment fees per Bangladesh law (13 respondents)	

Some respondents indicated that it was common practice to pay higher fees for work arrangements in “good” countries and/or companies (those understood to have better wages and/or working

conditions). As Mauritius was considered to be a good quality destination, fees tended to be quite high. Some respondents also reported paying higher fees if they were recruited through multiple layers of intermediaries. Once respondents had made a connection directly to a labor agency, it was sometimes possible to minimize fees by going directly to the agency rather than through layers of subagents.

Twelve respondents reported that they had paid a “booking fee” to the subagent or agent at the beginning of the recruitment process to secure their spot. Eleven of those respondents that paid a booking fee indicated the fee was nonrefundable, and that it would not be returned if they decided not to go through with the recruitment process. Reported booking fees ranged from BDT 10,000 (USD 127) to BDT 50,000 (USD 643), with an average of BDT 30,000 (USD 374).⁵⁸

One respondent indicated he paid the recruitment fee in several increments and believed that he would have lost whatever money he had already paid at whatever point he decided to withdraw from the process, including up to the entire recruitment cost. Other repercussions for withdrawing from the recruitment process early included fines, damage to relationships or reputation, problems paying back debts already incurred, and damage to a workers’ reputation on the job market.

In some cases, fees paid by respondents covered all the necessary medical and bureaucratic processes required to obtain jobs in Mauritius. In such cases, a total recruitment fee was charged and the agent or subagent told respondents that the money was used to pay for airfare and other travel costs, the Mauritian visa process, passport and biometrics fees (ultimately paid to the Bangladeshi government), to cover required medical testing, and to address miscellaneous administrative requirements. In some cases, respondents paid for their own passports, biometrics, and/or medical testing. In a few cases, they paid for their own airfare separately from the recruitment process. Medical testing reportedly cost between BDT 1,500 and BDT 3,500, and the cost of passport processing ranged from BDT 5,000 to BDT 9,000 (these numbers include respondents that paid directly for these services and those that were unaware how much of their total recruitment fee went to medical testing and passport costs). Just two respondents reported estimated costs for biometrics (BDT 2,200 and BDT 500, respectively).

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Recruitment Fees

High recruitment fees transfer the cost of hiring migrant workers from employers to workers. While recruitment fees alone are not necessarily linked directly to forced labor vulnerability, vulnerable migrant workers may take out loans to cover the cost of recruitment, especially when recruitment costs are particularly high. These loans often have unfavorable or exploitative terms, including high interest rates, which can increase workers’ vulnerability to debt bondage. In order to reduce this form of vulnerability, the leading ethical recruitment standards utilize the “Employer Pays Principle,” a framework which stipulates that the costs of recruitment should be borne by employers and not by workers.⁵⁹

Related forced labor indicatorⁱⁱ	
Involuntary work	Threat or menace of penalty:
N/A	debt bondage or manipulation of debt

ⁱⁱ As described above in Analytical Framework, Verité is not making a determination as to whether individual interview subjects were in an actual condition of forced labor. The relationship of specific labor conditions observed to forced labor indicators is noted here not to assert that forced labor was being experienced by individual respondents; but rather to note the ways in which the respondent population was exhibiting risk or vulnerability to forced labor conditions, and the nature and characteristics of that risk.

Debt

Job-linked recruitment debt was very common among migrant workers interviewed. The average loan amount was BDT 112,000 (USD 1,401), and of those that took out loans the highest amount borrowed was BDT 250,000 (USD 3,085).⁶⁰ The total loan amounts taken on by respondents amounted to about 4.5 months' wages on average,⁶¹ but individual debt-to-salary proportions varied widely because individual respondents' salaries varied significantly. Respondents indicated it took between three and 24 months to fully pay off their debts, and two respondents had outstanding debts related to their recruitment. Respondents indicated that failure to pay back their debts could include the loss of collateral and reputational damage, and in a few cases, the threat of physical violence.

Fifteen of the 18 respondents said they took out loans to cover the costs associated with their most recent recruitment to work in Mauritius.⁶²

Respondents who borrowed money to cover recruitment costs borrowed an average of BDT 112,000 (USD 1,401⁶³). The largest amount borrowed was BDT 250,000 (USD 3,085⁶⁴), and the smallest amount borrowed was BDT 30,000 (USD 382⁶⁵).

Total amount borrowed	# Respondents
BDT 30,000 – 35,000	2
BDT 70,000	2
BDT 100,000	5*
BDT 125,000-200,000	4*
BDT 250,000	1*
*respondents who took out loans to cover recruitment fees above the legal limit per Bangladeshi law (10 respondents)	

Only one respondent borrowed less than 50 percent of the total recruitment cost (15 percent), six borrowed between 50 and 80 percent of the total recruitment cost, five borrowed 100 percent of the total recruitment cost, and two borrowed slightly more than what they paid for recruitment (about 108 percent of the recruitment cost).

When comparing the total amount borrowed by respondents to their reported average monthly wages, their debts amounted to between about two weeks and 14 months of pay.

Amount of debt in terms of respondents' average reported monthly salaries ⁶⁶	# Respondents	Actual time reported to pay off all debt (# respondents)
Less than two months pay	4	6 months (1), 12 months (3)
Two to four months pay	6	6 months (1), 8 months (1), 12 months (1), 18 months (1), 24 months (2)
Six months of pay	1	3 months
10-11 months of pay	2	24 months (1), debt outstanding (1)
More than 14 months of pay	1	debt outstanding

Nine respondents borrowed money from local money lenders, six borrowed money from family and/or friends, and two borrowed from NGO microcredit programs. Most respondents only borrowed from one source – only two borrowed from multiple sources (in one case, from a local lender, from a microcredit program, as well as from family). Many respondents reported they had paid significant sums in interest to service their debts, and several respondents indicated that their families had leveraged prized family assets like ancestral land and family jewelry collections as collateral for loans.

Most respondents had already repaid their debts at the time of the interviews. Three said they paid off their debts within 6-8 months of arriving to Mauritius. Four indicated it took them about one year to pay off their debts, and three said it took them between 1.5-2 years. At the time of the interviews, two respondents still had debt related to recruitment fees from working in Mauritius.

Respondents with outstanding debt at the time of the interview

The first respondent with outstanding debt borrowed BDT 250,000 (the largest amount of debt of all the respondents) from three different money lenders, and still owed BDT 50,000 after more than three years working in the Mauritian garment sector. He was currently paying a monthly fee of BDT 2,500 to service the debt, and did not know how long it was going to take to pay it back completely.

The second respondent with outstanding debt had left his employment in the garment sector due to illness, but was still residing in Mauritius. At the time of the interview, he still owed the BDT 150,000 he borrowed from a money lender. His ability to repay the loan is made more difficult by the lender's repayment terms, which require him to repay the entire principle in a single payment; all payments prior to this go toward the monthly interest (BDT 5k) (a few respondents indicated this was part of the terms of their respective loans). The respondent estimates he will be able to repay the total amount in about one year.

These respondents had the second highest and highest debt-to-salary ratios, respectively, in the sample. The first respondent's debt amounted to roughly 10 months of his average pay, and the second respondent's debt amounted to about 14 months of his average pay.

The repercussions of failing to pay back what they owed varied depending on who respondents borrowed money from. A few suggested they could potentially face physical violence if they failed to pay back the loans, but most indicated that the loss of collateral (often assets put up by family members to finance the loan, including ancestral land and family jewelry collections) and reputational damage or family humiliation were the greatest risks. A few respondents mentioned that failing to pay off the loans quickly would result in even greater debt due to high interest rates.

Of those who did not borrow money to finance their recruitment process, one was able to pay her own recruitment costs directly because she had saved money from a prior trip to work in the Mauritian garment sector (which she had financed through a loan). Of the other two that did not borrow money, one did not have to pay any recruitment fees (because he worked with a Mauritian labor broker who apparently did not charge a fee up-front). The other did not explain why he did not need to take out any loans.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Recruitment Fees and Debt

Debt associated with recruitment and/or employment is linked to forced labor vulnerability. The debt incurred by respondents in order to pay the high recruitment fees demanded by Bangladeshi labor brokers increases their vulnerability to bonded labor. Bonded labor is a form of forced labor in which the job or activity is associated with:

- (i) advance payments or loans or excessive fees from recruiters and/or employers to the worker or to a person’s family members;
- (ii) a financial penalty, meaning that the terms of repayment are unspecified at the outset and/or in contravention of laws and regulations regarding the amount of interest or other repayment conditions, or the job or activity is under-remunerated (in relation to legal regulations or the labour market); and
- (iii) some form of coercion until a worker or family member has repaid the loan or payment advance⁶⁷

Related forced labor indicator	
Involuntary work	Threat or menace of penalty
N/A	debt bondage or manipulation of debt

Mandatory Medical and Pregnancy Testing

All respondents reported undergoing required medical testing prior to departure, per Mauritian policy on the recruitment of migrant workers.⁶⁸ Respondents indicated that they were not aware specifically what medical tests were conducted on their biological samples, but that blood and urine samples and in some cases chest x-rays were taken. Respondents indicators typically were unable to choose the center where medical tests were conducted – this was true both of those that paid a broker or agency for testing, and also those who paid directly. Some respondents reported that they would be denied employment if they failed any of the medical tests. Some respondents also took medical tests upon arrival to Mauritius, but were unable to explain what they were, other than that they would be sent home to Bangladesh if they failed them.

Two male respondents and three female respondents indicated that women are required to take pregnancy tests to be eligible for employment as migrant workers to Mauritius. Three of the four female respondents said they were required to take pregnancy tests, and were informed during the recruitment process that they would be denied work in Mauritius (if pregnancy discovered prior to departure) or would be sent home to Bangladesh (if pregnancy was discovered after arrival). One male respondent indicated he knew personally of several instances of women workers at his factory who became pregnant and were repatriated to their home countries.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Mandatory Medical and Pregnancy Testing

Mandatory pregnancy testing as a condition of employment is a form of gender discrimination prohibited by the Maternity Protection Convention of 2000 (ILO Convention 183). Convention 183 was ratified by Mauritius in 2019 and is currently in force in the country.⁶⁹

Though there is not a direct link between medical and pregnancy testing and forced labor, the fees paid by workers to obtain required tests contribute to their overall debt burden, which is a concern

related to forced labor vulnerability. Furthermore, the fact that female workers found to be pregnant might be sent home before their contracts are completed could result in exacerbated debt burdens related to the fees paid during recruitment.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work	Threat or menace of penalty
N/A	Debt bondage or manipulation of debt

Contracts

In general, respondents described having little time or ability to review or understand their contracts prior to signing. In some cases, agents demanded that respondents sign their contracts immediately upon receipt, or the same day of departure for Mauritius. Some participants reported that their contracts were in English, a language none of the respondents were able to read or speak.

All but two of the respondents reported they were unable to read their own contracts. In some cases this was due to a respondent’s illiteracy in the language of the contract. In other cases, respondents reported feeling rushed to sign the contract immediately before departure, or amidst long lines of workers. Four respondents indicated they were expressly prohibited from reviewing the contract themselves, and three reported they were either rushed or admonished by brokers when they attempted to review the contract themselves. Eight respondents indicated the contract was never explained to them, and another eight reported they never received a copy of their contracts. In the case of the two workers that went to Mauritius through Mauritian labor intermediaries, neither saw or signed a contract until arrival in Mauritius. Additionally, several workers indicated they signed other documents during the recruitment process or at the airport prior to departure but were generally unable to explain what those documents were.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Contracts

Inability to understand and fully consent to contract –

Informed consent is critical in ensuring that work is undertaken voluntarily and free from coercion. In their *Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour*, the ICLS defines involuntary work as “any work taking place without the free and informed consent of the worker”. Informed consent during the recruitment process is only possible when workers have full information about their employment terms and conditions. Employment contracts are crucial to the process of communicating this information to workers.

In some cases, inability to review contracts can be linked to the use of deception in recruitment. Deception is a major component of both unethical recruitment and forced labor vulnerability. The ILO indicates that deception is a crucial element of the “involuntariness” aspect of forced labor.”ⁱ There are three ILO indicators of forced labor (involuntary work) that are relevant to this responsible recruitment principle:

- “situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent”
- “work for other employers than agreed”
- “abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer”

Most leading company codes of conduct require that workers must be provided with a written employment agreement in their native language that contains a description of terms and conditions of employment prior to the worker departing from his or her country of origin. These codes also prohibit substitution or change(s) to the employment agreement upon arrival in the receiving country unless these changes are made to meet local law, and provide equal or better terms.⁷⁰

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work	Threat or menace of penalty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person's consent; • abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer • work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment 	N/A

Employment in Mauritius

Working Hours

Some respondents reported working hours in excess of the limits set by Mauritian law.

Days worked by respondents while in Mauritius ranged from five to seven days per week. Several respondents indicated it was common to work full hours Monday through Friday and a half day on Saturdays. In general, respondents reported working between eight and 13 hours⁷¹ at regular (non-overtime) pay rates. While there was some variation, most workers indicated a 10-12 hour daily shift was typical (60-72 hours per week), with about two to three hours of daily overtime. Respondents indicated they typically started the work day at around 7-8 am, and often finished work between 8 and 10 pm. All respondents who reported working daily overtime hours indicated that it was mandatory, and they could not be excused from these hours without a legitimate medical reason.

Respondents also reported the number of hours they worked during peak times, including during extremely busy periods. Many respondents indicated that there were three months during the winter that were particularly busy. In the most extreme cases, workers reported working upwards of 15 hours per day during busy seasons. One respondent reported having worked a 17-hour day. Respondents indicated that they did not receive sufficient advance notice when overtime would be required. Some respondents reported that there were times they did not work at all due to insufficient demand. The lack of work impacted some respondents' salaries, while others indicated they were still paid the basic wage.

Two respondents indicated that their employers kept two different sets of records of hours, and that false records were used to show buyers, auditors, and other visitors that overtime and working hours were in compliance with relevant laws and standards.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Working Hours

Hours in excess of Mauritian national law -

The excessive working hours reported by some respondents during peak periods are prohibited by Mauritian law. The Workers’ Rights Act of 2019 indicates that a normal working week consists of 45 hours of work, including 5 days of 9-hour work days, or a 6 day work week involving 5 8-hour days and one 5-hour day.⁷² Workers are entitled under the law to a rest of “not less than 11 consecutive hours in any day.” The law also stipulates that:

“No worker, other than a garde malade, shall, except in special circumstances and subject to any other enactment, be required to work for more than 12 hours per day.”⁷³

Overtime work without overtime pay -

Working overtime hours without corresponding overtime wage rates is prohibited by the Mauritius Workers' Rights Act of 2019, and requires workers to be compensated “for each extra [overtime] hour at not less than one and a half times the rate at which the work is remunerated when performed during the normal hours.”⁷⁴

Overtime without sufficient notice and mandatory overtime -

Respondents reported being required to work overtime hours with insufficient notice according to the Mauritian Employment Rights Act of 2019, which stipulates:

“no employer shall require a worker to perform work in excess of the stipulated hours unless he has given, as far as is practicable, at least 24 hours’ notice to the worker of the extra work to be performed.”⁷⁵

Furthermore, a requirement of excessive mandatory overtime hours from which workers may not be excused without a medical rationale is an indicator of involuntary work.

Lack of transparency in job terms re: working hours -

Respondents indicated they had been deceived about the number of hours they would be required to work. While this often meant they worked fewer hours than promised (rather than excessive hours), respondents found this undesirable due to the corresponding reduction in pay they received (a lack of hours often brought their salaries below what was originally promised during recruitment).

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary Work	Threat or menace of penalty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent; • abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer 	<p>N/A</p>

Pay and Wages

All respondents reported being paid directly by their employers. Three were paid in cash, and the rest were paid via bank deposit. Respondents were paid either monthly or biweekly.

Most respondents had little detailed understanding of how their pay rates were calculated. This was due in part to the fact that many respondents said they never received pay slips, and several respondents who reported asking for clarification about how their pay was calculated were ignored or rebuked. In general, respondents reported that their understanding was that pay was calculated using piece rates as well as rates based on the number of hours worked. Some workers were paid overtime rates, but others were not (instead being paid “straight time” for all hours worked or pieces produced).

Respondents were able to report their monthly take-home salary range. The lowest salary reported was MUR 5,000 (USD 115) per month. The highest salary reported was MUR 35,000 (USD 805) per month.

Monthly Salaries Reported by Respondents

MUR Monthly	USD Monthly	Total # respondents	Female	Male	Jobs
MUR 5k-7k	USD 115-161	3*	1	2	Sewing machine operators
MUR 8k-10k	USD 184-225	1*			Flat lock machine operator
MUR 10k-15k	USD 225-345	7	1	6	varied occupations (3 regular sewing machine operators, 1 ironing/finishing, 1 machine maintenance, 1 cutting)
MUR 16k-25k	USD 368-575	6	1	5	4 regular sewing machine operators, 1 sewing shirt collars
MUR 25k-35k	USD 575-805	2	1	1	1 sewing machine operator for samples, 1 sewing machine operator for shirts. (The highest paid worker (35k monthly) was female.)
*Respondents earning at or below the current national minimum wage for export enterprises (MUR 9,875 per month) ⁷⁶					

Several respondents indicated their monthly take-home pay varied within a range – typically the range involved a difference of MUR 2-5k. The largest variation was MUR 16,000, which the respondent explained was due to variation in overtime hours.

Reported salaries did not show any patterns related to gender. Women respondents’ salaries ranged from MUR 5k monthly to MUR 35k monthly, and the highest paid worker in the sample was female (MUR 35k monthly). Salaries also ranged widely amongst respondents working for the same factory during roughly equivalent timelines (at one factory, salaries ranged from MUR 12k monthly to MUR 25k monthly, at another they ranged from MUR 5k monthly to MUR 35k. There were no patterns in salary amount related to type of product or type of job in the respondent pool (regular sewing machine operator salaries ranged from MUR 5k to MUR 35k monthly).

Twelve respondents indicated that their salaries were enough to live comfortably in Mauritius. However, many noted that the salary was not sufficient considering the level of debt they incurred in order to obtain the job, and in some cases felt it was not enough to send back an adequate stream of remittances. Some respondents also indicated that the wage was sufficient as long as nothing went wrong. One female worker, for example, was sick and unable to work for nine months during her tenure in Mauritius. She remained in the worker housing during this time but was not paid, and found herself dependent on the charity and assistance of co-workers, who were her only source of food.

Most respondents indicated they were paid on time. Fourteen respondents said there were periods where they were not paid at all. Two said they were not paid during times when they were ill and could not work. One respondent indicated one month’s wages were withheld for a two-week period during which the factory was apparently unable to pay workers due to financial constraints. Another worker said he was not paid his final month’s wages after he told management he was going to end his contract early.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Pay and Wages

Minimum wage –

While most respondents felt the wages they were paid were enough to live comfortably in Mauritius, some were paid very low wages, and a few indicated that their wages had been withheld at some point during their employment. The “Know Your Rights” guide for migrant workers in Mauritius, published by the Mauritian government in March 2019, indicates that the prevailing minimum wage was MUR 8140 per month during a time when most of the respondents were present in Mauritius. Four respondents reported who were in Mauritius during that time reported salary ranges at or below MUR 8,000-9,000 per month. The current national minimum wage for export-oriented enterprise workers is MUR 9,875 per month.⁷⁷

Understanding of wage calculations and pay slips –

Respondents had little understanding of how their pay and wages were calculated, and some employers rebuffed respondents’ attempts to understand pay calculations. Respondents also indicated they had been deceived about their pay rates during the recruitment process. A lack of transparency into wage calculations can make workers vulnerable to wage theft. Mauritian law requires employers to provide workers with an itemized pay slip (Workers’ Rights Act, 2019)⁷⁸

Low and unstable wages and debt –

Several respondents indicated that the salary was insufficient given the debts they took on during the recruitment process. Very low wages relative to the amount of debt incurred can produce prolonged, intractable debt, which can increase vulnerability to forced labor.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with very low or no wages • Situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debt bondage or manipulation of debt • Withholding of wages or other promised benefits

Deductions

Respondents were generally unable to explain deductions in much detail, though a few workers did provide significant detail about the deductions they were aware of.

Housing and Accommodation

Not all respondents were able to say how much they paid for accommodation/food because many people did not receive pay slips with itemized deductions. Only five workers were able to estimate the amount deducted for food and housing. The total estimated deductions reported for food and housing

ranged from MUR 1,300 to MUR 5,750 (average MUR 3,054). Housing deductions reportedly ranged from MUR 1250 to MUR 1165, while food deductions ranged from MUR1300 to MUR 4500. Because these charges were accounted for in deductions, the worker salaries reported above reflect take-home pay where these deductions are already discounted.

Disciplinary deductions

A few respondents indicated that deductions were made for disciplinary reasons, including as a penalty for absenteeism. Some respondents indicated if they missed a day of work without an appropriate excuse, they were marked absent for one day and more than one day's wages were deducted as a penalty. Additionally, one worker reported BDT 8k was deducted from her wages due to mistakes made during work.

Forced savings

Twelve of the 18 respondents indicated that some amount of money was deducted from their pay on a monthly basis for some kind of government-run "savings" program. Most respondents were unable to explain what the program was or how much was deducted because they did not receive itemized pay slips and had no records of what was deducted. Some of the workers referred to a program called "NPS" (presumably National Pension Scheme⁷⁹), while others discussed a program called "PRGF" (presumably Monthly Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund, a fund established by the Mauritius Workers' Rights Act of 2019 which provides for payment to a worker upon their death or retirement⁸⁰). Because workers did not fully understand the deductions, it is impossible to determine if their comments referred to multiple types of deductions or one deduction referred to by different names. The descriptions here account for the variety of explanations provided by respondents regarding any kind of savings fund that was facilitated through salary deductions.⁸¹

Respondents indicated deductions to contribute to any kind of "savings" fund (whether PRGF, NPS, or unnamed) ranged from MUR 10 to 400; one respondent indicated the amounts deducted depended on the particular worker's earnings; another suggested that the deduction amount was 3% of the worker's total wages (the percentage was reportedly later reduced to 1%). One respondent said that through the PRGF migrant workers could collect a "one-time sum" of MUR 20k at the end of their tenures in Mauritius.

Some respondents indicated that they believed they would not be given the savings money if they ended their contracts early (see more in the "Ability to quit/terminate contract early" section below). Some suggested that this was because the employer opted to retain the funds in order to cover the cost of repatriating the worker.

One respondent indicated that he collected the savings fund after his first four years of work (a total of MUR 7k), thinking that he would not return to Mauritius. But he later changed his mind and decided to stay in Mauritius for another four years, continuing to contribute to what he referred to as the NPS program. The respondent indicated that he was not able to collect the savings for the final four years of his service due to a policy that migrant workers were allowed to collect the NPS savings only once during their tenure with a specific employer. As a result, he had to sacrifice about BDT 60K. When he raised the issue with his manager, he was told that when age exceeded 65 years in his passport, he would be able to collect the savings. However, the company did not provide him any reference number or receipt to claim the fund in the future. The respondent assumes that he will not be able to claim the funds in the future and felt that he was being denied the funds as a form of retribution for a prior incident he had with the employer. The respondent learned later on that the management crossed his name off of the "recontract" documents at the end of his fourth year of service, thus preventing him from collecting his NPS savings for his last four years of work in Mauritius.

Two respondents that worked with the same employer indicated that MUR 25 per month was deducted from their salaries, starting at the two-year mark. Their employer reportedly provided a 2.5% matching deposit. Workers were told that they could collect the funds at the end of their employment tenures. The respondents indicated that workers who terminated the contract early were denied access to the funds.

Another respondent indicated that all sewing operators had a deduction of approximately MUR 350-300 monthly which they were told contributed to what she called an NPS savings program. Workers were told they could collect the savings after two years, but neither the respondent nor anyone she knew had actually been able to collect the fund prior to departure for Bangladesh. The respondent indicated her belief that the fund was withheld in order to pay for workers' return airfare.

Other deductions

A few respondents said uniform costs were also deducted from their salaries.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Deductions

Housing deductions -

The Mauritian government's "Know Your Rights" pamphlet for migrant workers stipulates that lodging should be provided to migrant workers by their employers, with no cost to workers.⁸² However, a majority of respondents indicated they were charged by their employers to cover the cost of their accommodation.

Punitive deductions -

Punitive wage deductions are prohibited by Mauritius' Workers' Rights Act of 2019, which stipulates that "No employer shall, in respect of the payment of remuneration, deduct any amount – (a) by way of fine or compensation for poor or negligent work or for damage caused to the property of the employer; (b) as a direct or indirect payment for the purpose of obtaining or retaining employment; (c) by way of discount, interest or any charge on account of any advance of remuneration made to a worker."⁸³

Savings deductions -

According to the Mauritian Workers' Rights Act of 2019, workers must receive a pay slip indicating their contribution to the Portable Retirement Gratuity Fund and workers must sign/print a remuneration book to affirm they have been paid.⁸⁴ Most respondents who discussed any kind of savings fund said they did not know how it was calculated and did not receive a pay slip that explained their deductions in a way they understood. Because respondents had a limited understanding of the savings-related deductions to their pay, it is difficult to come to any certain conclusions about the legality of the deductions. However, several respondents reported that they were contributing to a savings fund for which they had difficulty (or were utterly prohibited from) accessing. Some also indicated that they risked forfeiting these funds if they decided to end their contracts early. This is a form of coercion to stay in the job, which limits the ability of the worker to fully and freely consent to work. Further research is needed in order to determine whether and how Bangladeshi migrant workers are enabled to access (or prohibited from obtaining) the money they contribute to these funds.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
Work with no or limited freedom to terminate work contract	Withholding of wages or other promised benefits

Nature of the Job and Transparency of Job Terms

Many respondents found that the terms of their employment were different from what they were told during the recruitment process.

Ten of the respondents said that recruiters promised them they would be provided with free housing and food while working in Mauritius, but that instead charges were deducted to cover these services. Some respondents were surprised by the poor quality of the food, housing, and medical care provided to them (free or otherwise) relative to what they had been told by recruiters. Some respondents indicated they were placed in different departments/positions than what they had been told during the recruitment process, and/or were asked to do tasks outside of their job descriptions (eg. clean). Several respondents also indicated that their actual hours and/or wages were different (typically less, though sometimes more) than what was promised (see Pay and Wages section). Several respondents felt they had been intentionally deceived about the terms of their work during the recruitment process.

Ten respondents indicated that their wages were lower than promised. Seven respondents said this was due to the fact that they worked fewer regular and/or overtime hours than they were originally offered during recruitment. For example, one respondent was promised eight hours of regular paid time plus two to four hours paid at overtime rates, but upon arrival he was made to work 12-hour days paid as regular time with no overtime pay. He discovered that the lack of overtime pay was actually outlined in the contract he signed prior to departure from Bangladesh, but because he was not allowed to read or maintain a copy of the contract, he was unaware of these terms. In one case the lower salary occurred when a worker was promised a higher paying job as a mechanic but instead was assigned to a lower paying job as a sewing machine operator upon arrival.

One respondent indicated that his labor broker’s deception about his salary led to a cycle of indebtedness. The respondent was promised a monthly salary of BDT 35k by the labor broker. In reality, the respondent was only paid BDT 10k-12k monthly for the first six months of work (after which he earned approximately BDT 16k monthly). Having taken multiple loans from multiple sources to finance his travel, this sum was barely enough to enable him to repay one of his loans. The respondent felt strapped to his job and trapped in a never-ending cycle of indebtedness. Eventually he resolved to take a series of small loans from friends to repay one of the original money lenders because his earnings were not sufficient to cover the debt payments. Then, in order to repay his friends, he began to take up small temporary assignments in subcontracting factories on “day contracts” on weekends, where he was paid “under the table”. Gradually this strategy enabled him to pay off his debts within another year.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Nature of the job

Transparency of job terms and consent –
 Many respondents indicated that several aspects of the terms of employment (hours, wages, deductions) were different than what they were promised during recruitment. Many felt they had

been actively deceived by labor agents and subagents during the recruitment process. Deception is a major component of forced labor vulnerability. The ILO indicates that deception is a crucial element of the “involuntariness” aspect of forced labor, describing their list of involuntariness indicators as “circumstances” that, “when undertaken under deception or uninformed,” “may give rise to involuntary work.”⁸⁵

Deception and debt -

Additionally, migrant workers who are deceived about their wages may be less able to make informed decisions about how much debt to take on in order to finance their recruitment, which can contribute to situations of intractable debt. Indebtedness can contribute to vulnerability to forced labor.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person’s consent;	Debt bondage or manipulation of debt

Health and Safety and Working Conditions

Many respondents said they felt their work was generally safe, but that they could not refuse any work they felt was unsafe.

In general, most (15/18) workers said they felt their work was safe, and that they were provided with adequate protective equipment (13/18) to do their jobs safely. However, only three of the 18 respondents indicated they could refuse unsafe work. In general, respondents said that their job assignments were non-negotiable, and there was little room to push back or negotiate different tasks or working conditions.

The few workers that reported concerns related to safety and protective equipment at work indicated that PPE provided was inadequate, or was distributed irregularly (sometimes only during visits from auditors or buyers). One respondent reported that the factory’s production lines were narrow and cramped with machines, which made it difficult to walk through the aisles and likely presented a fire hazard in the respondent’s estimation. Another respondent indicate that workers were not allowed to leave during fire alarms.

One respondent reported that there was an accident in the factory where he worked, in which a Bangladeshi worker got his arm caught in a machine. The accident was allegedly caused by a problem with the machine, but the respondent indicated that the management concealed this during the subsequent investigation. The factory provided some support for the injured worker’s treatment and repatriation, but some of the workers also raised funds (about BDT 100K) to help their injured colleague.

Worker Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Few respondents commented in detail about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their experiences in Mauritius. Three respondents shared that their factories provided masks and other safety training and equipment to help protect workers from COVID-19 exposure. Some respondents reported that they did not work during COVID-related factory shutdowns, but were paid their basic wage (with no overtime

pay) and were allowed to remain in the employer-provided dormitories. One respondent reported he was forced work during the COVID-19 pandemic when all other factories had shut down. He reported that he and his co-worker were transported by company-owned shuttles between the dormitory and the factory during that time. According to the respondent, the factory management did not follow any safety protocols, and workers did not receive safety masks, gloves, or hand sanitizer. The respondent and his co-workers were told that they would be paid extra for working during the shut-down, but despite working for 2.5 months under these conditions, they were not paid any extra wage.

This study did not focus on the effects of COVID-19 on Bangladeshi migrant workers in Mauritius. Other studies have shown that the pandemic has had significant impacts on Bangladeshi migrant workers that have increased their overall vulnerability. For more information, see the 2021 NORC study, [Shattered Dreams: Bangladeshi Migrant Workers During the Global Pandemic](#).⁸⁶

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Health, Safety, and Working Conditions

Respondents were unable to refuse work they felt was unsafe (without a medical excuse), and in some cases, inadequate PPE was provided (or no PPE was provided at all). Being made to work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented is an indicator of involuntary work.

According to the Mauritian government’s “Know Your Rights” pamphlet for migrant workers, migrant workers “have the right to safe and healthy working conditions and to be informed of the safety and health standards that apply to [their] workplace... [and the] employer must keep the risks to safety and health arising from hazards at the work place to the minimum and has to comply with the Occupational and Health Safety Act 2005 and the regulations made thereunder.”⁸⁷

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment	N/A

Workers Experiencing Serious Health Issues

Five respondents reported becoming seriously ill and receiving inadequate support from their employers while in Mauritius.

Five of the 18 respondents shared that they had had serious medical issues while working in Mauritius. In all five of these cases, the respondents felt that the situation was handled poorly by the employer, and they did not receive appropriate care.⁸⁸ Some of the respondents reported their ailments were gastrointestinal in nature, relating to the poor quality of food they were provided. One reported a musculoskeletal injury related to the repetitive nature and long hours involved in his work. Some of the respondents ended up paying large sums of their own money to doctors outside of the employer in search of treatment while in Mauritius. One respondent reportedly paid around BDT 300k (nearly USD 3500 in today’s exchange rate) for medical treatment in Mauritius. Another paid BDT 100-150k (roughly USD 1200-1750, see Example 2 below). Two respondents indicated that their employers provided some medical assistance, but that it was limited to handing out generic pain killers or medication for gas/indigestion, regardless of the workers’ complaints of symptoms. More complex problems tended to be ignored by employers, and workers often sought medical assistance from outside the factory for

more serious ailments. One respondent indicated that his employer provided transportation to outside hospitals when needed, but the process to request such transportation was complicated and workers were often chastised for making such requests. In some cases workers were made to wait up to six or seven hours before the transportation was arranged.

Two respondents described in detail their medical concerns while in Mauritius, as well as their employers' responses:

Example 1: After successfully completing his first three-year contract, a male respondent in his 30's decided to renew his contract for another year. During the fourth year the respondent became gravely ill with gastrointestinal issues which he felt were related to the poor quality of food provided by his employer. During his illness, the respondent was unable to work for several months. During this time his employer allowed him to continue to live in the dorms and continued to pay him his basic wage. The respondent did not request to end his contract early, rather, he wished to be provided appropriate medical treatment in Mauritius.

The respondent indicated that at some point in his illness he realized he would not be able to fully recover without significant medical intervention. He asked his employer for appropriate medical treatment from his employer, but was only provided with basic treatment including over the counter medications. The respondent felt the treatment was perfunctory and insufficient. He was told to stay home and rest, but also felt generally "ignored" by the employer as his condition worsened. Ultimately the respondent said he felt he would only obtain the treatment he needed if he returned to Bangladesh where medical services were more affordable and he would have family and community support.

After months of feeling "stuck" in Mauritius, and feeling depressed and anxious about his debts, the employer paid for him to return to Bangladesh in December 2020. After more than 3.5 years working in Bangladesh he returned without savings, still indebted, and critically ill.

At the time of the interview (October 2021), the respondent indicated he had had surgery to address his condition just a couple of months prior. The respondent was visibly unwell, and indicated he was recovering very slowly from the surgery. During our interview with him, the respondent became visibly angry and frustrated. He felt that his employer in Mauritius had been negligent with his situation, and was concerned about his debts. He indicated that he had gone into further debt since returning to Bangladesh due to the costs of his treatment and his inability to work. His family was receiving no income because he was still unable to work and his wife was occupied with caring for his continued health needs as well as their children and the household. Thus, the family was living off of loans and assistance from family. The respondent was worried that he would not recover sufficiently in order to work again, though he hoped to leave for foreign employment again once he has fully recovered.

Example 2: Another respondent, a woman in her mid-20's, indicated things were going well for her for the first year and a half of her employment in Mauritius, but then she began suffering from an illness that left her unable to work. She sought treatment from her employer, but was only given over the counter medication, which was ineffective. The respondent felt that the factory doctor became irritated by her repeated visits and requests for treatment. She also sought treatment outside the factory in Mauritius and spent between BDT 100k 150k (roughly USD 1,200-1,800).⁸⁹ As she was earning an average of MUR 6,000 per month at the time (roughly BDT 11,700 or USD 138), her personal expenditures on medical care amounted to 8-12 months of her typical salary.

During the time she could not work due to her illness, her employer allowed her to continue to live in the worker housing but did not pay her or provide her with food. The respondent reported that she

struggled a lot during this time. As she was without income she depended on help from her dorm mates who snuck her extra food whenever they could. Sometimes, though, she went without food.

Seeing that her condition was not improving, the respondent decided to return to Bangladesh. However, her employer denied her request to be sent home. She made many requests to the employer to release her, and was denied several times. The respondent reported that employers were generally unwilling to let go of “good” workers, in this case referring to skilled and “well-behaved” women with “clean” records (no history of complaints, “scandals,” or other social issues.

“As I fit into that profile, they were reluctant to let me go.”

Eventually, after speaking out publicly about her situation, the respondent managed to negotiate her return to Bangladesh through the support of the Bangladeshi recruitment agency that had facilitated her employment in Mauritius. The employer resisted and used a variety of tactics to prevent her departure and avoid having to pay for her return airfare. Ultimately she did not have to pay her own airfare, but felt that she would have incurred that cost herself if the recruitment agency had not gotten involved in the negotiation. At the time of the interview, the respondent indicated she had sought medical treatment on return to Bangladesh and said her condition was now under control with the proper medication. She was preparing to depart for a second overseas job, this time in another country.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Workers experiencing serious health issues

Support by employers to obtain adequate medical care -

During the recruitment process, respondents were told their medical care would be provided by the employer. Per the Mauritian government’s “Know Your Rights” guide for migrant workers, employers must “ensure, at his own costs, that [workers] are promptly taken to a public hospital or other similar institution in case [a worker is] injured at work or sick.”⁹⁰ Medical care at public hospitals in Mauritius is free for all, including migrant workers.⁹¹ However, some respondents ended up paying significant sums of money out of pocket for medical care.

Serious illness and inability to end contract early without penalty -

Furthermore, some workers were not allowed to terminate their contracts early without penalty, despite being seriously ill. According to the Mauritian government’s publication “Know Your Rights: a guide for migrant workers in Mauritius,” employers are obligated to pay for a migrant worker’s return airfare in all cases, including “at the expiry of [the] work permit or early termination of [the] contract of employment or for any cause whatsoever.”⁹² Limited freedom to terminate a work contract without penalty is an indicator of involuntary work.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
work with no or limited freedom to terminate work contract	abuse of workers’ vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation

In general, respondents felt they were treated humanely at work. Many respondents indicated that workers who spoke out against working conditions or asked questions about pay or other concerns risked becoming “targeted” by management.

Most (12/18) respondents said they felt they were treated fairly at work. Those that said they were not treated fairly (6/18) described several different concerns, including⁹³:

- Some workers forced to cover other workers’ production targets when they fell behind
- Bangladeshi workers’ overtime pay rate was lower than the overtime pay rate of Mauritian nationals
- Muslim workers prevented from carrying out prayers during the work day
- Sexual harassment of Bangladeshi women workers by Mauritian co-workers
- Systematic discrimination in treatment of Bangladeshi workers by supervisors and management (three workers reported this)

Grievance mechanisms were not an explicit focus of the research. However, participants were asked if they felt they could speak up about issues they encountered at work. Fewer than half (8/18) answered affirmatively. Those that said they could not speak up indicated that language barriers, lack of access to middle-management, and fear of targeting was a major barrier. Many workers distinguished generally fair treatment from being “targeted.” Workers who voiced concerns about working conditions or behaved in ways otherwise displeasing to management became “targeted” or labeled as “trouble makers” by management, which meant they could be subject to undesirable work positions, harassment by managers, and other kinds of disciplinary actions and discriminatory treatment, including dismissal and even deportation.

In one case, a female worker reported that during her time in Mauritius she was forced to switch job tasks, from machine operation to ironing. The respondent did not want to work in the ironing department because it was more laborious work and had a lower wage rate. When she protested, she was harassed by the supervisor of the ironing department and threatened with dismissal and repatriation to Bangladesh.

Another respondent shared that he was targeted after he raised several questions to management about his working hours, contract, and salary calculation. He was reprimanded several times for asking these questions, and at one point was brought into the management office where he was scolded, threatened, and intimidated. This worker indicated that he was aware of incidences of physical violence perpetrated by a Mauritian-based Bangladeshi labor agent who would reportedly send men to assault workers if they protested against discrimination or management misconduct. Most respondents said they had not been targeted themselves, but indicated that it was common practice in their workplaces. Two other workers indicated their general approach to daily life in the factory was to avoid becoming targets of management harassment by keeping “low profiles.” They reportedly saw some of their co-workers become targeted after voicing complaints – the complainants faced rebukes, threats, and disciplinary actions including being marked absent and receiving wage deductions.

Participants were also asked a series of questions to determine their awareness of and involvement in affiliations with worker organizations, local community organizations, and other advocacy and direct action individuals and organizations. They were asked about visits to the facility from outside organizations, including journalists, NGOs, labor unions, government, and others. They were also asked about their participation in any kind of direct action or other action related to improving working conditions or seeking assistance from sources other than the employer. Overall, respondents reported extremely limited awareness and contact with any such organizations or individuals outside their

employer. Some indicated they were aware of such organizations, but feared seeking help for fear of reprisals from their employers, or said they had no opportunity to do so due to their demanding work schedules or due to the language barrier. Several respondents said that workers who did seek assistance from/affiliation with outside organizations would become “targeted” and possibly dismissed and deported. One respondent said workers were actively discouraged from associating with labor and community groups outside the factory.

When discussing what recourse they did have for issues that arose at work, many respondents discussed a person they referred to as the Bangladesh “team leader,” who was typically a Bangladeshi individual who supervised the Bangladeshi work force (this management structure seems to be common amongst garment sector companies). The Bangladesh team leader was an important point of contact for several respondents, and was the only person that some workers felt they could speak to if they had problems at work or in their personal lives (ie. illness or other concerns). However, some workers questioned the ability of the Bangladesh team leader to enact change based on complaints. In some cases, the Bangladesh team leader seemed to operate more as an internal sounding board within the Bangladeshi workforce rather than a manager with the capacity to remediate workers’ concerns. One worker indicated that the Bangladeshi team leader at his facility operated more as a surveillor of Bangladeshi workers, saying that the team leader called regular meetings with workers which he used to intimidate workers and prohibited workers from speaking (on penalty of targeting, disciplinary actions, dismissal, or deportation). Workers also reported receiving significant social support from co-workers, especially during times of illness or distress.

Discipline

Disciplinary mechanisms were not a major focus of the research. However, some respondents discussed discipline at work during the interview. For instance, one worker indicated she frequently saw other workers facing disciplinary actions (for making mistakes in production, missing targets, for going out of the premises and returning late, or for arguments/quarrels among themselves). Disciplinary actions she witnessed included being suspended or being called into the management office and being scolded or humiliated. She knew of workers that had been suspended between three and seven days depending on the severity of the issue. Such suspensions resulted in the worker being counted in absent, which resulted in salary deductions (sometimes for more time than work actually missed). Repercussions were especially severe for individuals who spent the night outside of dormitory.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Humane Treatment, Access to Remedy, and Discipline

The Mauritian government’s “Know Your Rights” guide for migrant workers indicates the following about workers’ grievances:

“You can register formal complaints in case of non-compliance with your terms and conditions of employment, safety and health at work, and living conditions in your lodging accommodation against your Employer at the relevant authority... If your employer is abusing you, do not allow the situation to continue. Do ensure your safety and seek advice and help from Government institutions.”⁹⁴

However, respondents reported that “targeting” and punitive wage deductions were used to penalize workers for speaking up or asking questions related to working conditions, wages, and other concerns. In extreme cases workers were harassed or threatened with disciplinary action, dismissal,

or deportation – from factory management and from third parties linked to Bangladeshi labor brokers. Punitive suspensions with disproportionate wage deductions were also used. Respondents were discouraged from interacting with outside organizations that might support their claims for improvements (ie. labor unions). These kinds of punitive and retributive practices by employers limit migrant workers’ capacity to speak up about undesirable conditions or unfair treatment at work.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
N/A	abuse of workers’ vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation

Pregnant Workers

Respondents reported that pregnant women workers would be dismissed and deported to Bangladesh; one woman respondent indicated her employer required women workers to take periodic pregnancy tests.

Many respondents indicated that they were aware that workers who became pregnant would be dismissed and returned to Bangladesh. Two women respondents indicated they felt they would likely have had to pay for their own return airfare if they were discovered to be pregnant after arrival to Mauritius.

One female respondent indicated that female foreign contract workers were warned about pregnancy-related job dismissal as part of their employment orientation in Mauritius. She reported that any Bangladeshi workers who became pregnant while working in Mauritius were promptly dismissed from work and sent back to Bangladesh, and shared that a married couple that worked at her place of employment had been returned to Bangladesh when the wife became pregnant. Furthermore, she reported that if management discovered that a single or unmarried foreign contract worker was pregnant during her routine checkup, the worker would be reprimanded by management or reported to the police. One male respondent indicated that any single female Bangladeshi migrant workers that were discovered to be pregnant would be immediately sent home.

One female respondent indicated that her factory regularly conducted pregnancy tests of female workers. Workers that were found to be pregnant were dismissed from work and sent to their home countries. The respondent gave a specific example of a co-worker who was in Mauritius with her husband. When she became pregnant and was sent home, her husband also returned to Bangladesh. In this case, the return ticket was provided by the company (even though she technically breached the contract period). She also reported that female workers were instructed by the factory management to be careful to avoid pregnancy.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Pregnant Workers

The findings described here regarding pregnant workers have no direct implications regarding forced labor vulnerability. However, Article 64 of the ***Mauritian Workers’ Rights Act of 2019*** protects workers from employment termination based on pregnancy.⁹⁵ Furthermore, mandatory pregnancy testing as a condition of employment is a form of gender discrimination prohibited by the ***Maternity***

Protection Convention of 2000 (ILO Convention 183). Convention 183 was ratified by Mauritius in 2019 and is currently in force in the country. ⁹⁶

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
N/A	N/A

Housing and Food

Several respondents reported poor quality living conditions and food.

All respondents reported their housing was provided by the employer. Most facilities also provided all meals to workers, while in some cases workers were responsible for procuring and cooking their own food. In some cases, workers were charged for food and housing, and in other cases both were provided free. In a few cases, workers received allowances to cover food expenses (in the case where workers procured their own food).

All respondents reported living in employer-provided housing while working in the garment sector in Mauritius. Two respondents indicated that the place where they lived was inside the same building as the facility where they worked. Three respondents indicated that the place where they lived was inside the factory compound, but not in the building where they worked. The rest indicated that the housing was fully separate from the facility where they worked – some were able to walk to work and others took employer-provided transportation. Some workers paid for this transportation through pay deductions while others indicated the transportation was free of cost.

All respondents indicated that the people with whom they lived in the housing were employees of the same factory where they worked (no family living arrangements). Some respondents lived in two-story houses with individual rooms with doors, while others lived in large open rooms with many bunk beds – sometimes these large rooms had doors and sometimes they were divided into sections. The largest number of workers reported in a single housing building was 2000, and the smallest number was four. The largest number of workers reported sharing in a single room was 250, and the smallest number was four. Many respondents reported that visitors were not allowed in the housing.

# of workers in shared room	# respondents	Gender
10 or fewer	7	3 female, 4 male
11-25	5	2 female, 3 male
40-100	2	All male
100-200	3	All male
250	1	Male

Seven respondents indicated that the quality of the housing was adequate, while four said it was not of good quality. Five indicated specifically that there were inadequate hygiene facilities (toilets and/or washrooms/showers).

Overall, the quality of housing varied significantly across the respondents' experiences, as did their level of satisfaction with their accommodations. A few examples from respondents illustrate this range:

Worst	Mid-range	Best
<p>A 31 year-old male, reported that the housing where he stayed was in deplorable conditions. In this instance, the accommodation was located in a two-storied workers' house within a few minutes walk of the factory. Workers stayed in a large hall with around 60 bunk beds and no partitions to divide up the living space. Thus, this respondent lived in overcrowded and cramped conditions with 120 workers in one room. As there were only 12 toilets for 120 workers, there were long queues for the washrooms, especially in the mornings. Workers were responsible for keeping their accommodation clean, but a continuous shortage of water made the place unsanitary. This respondent indicated it was often difficult to sleep at night sharing a space with so many other workers, and that they even suffered an infestation of bed bugs while he lived there.</p>	<p>A 28 year-old female respondent indicated that she lived with 16 people in one large room in a building with around 200 female workers. The residents all slept on 2-tier bunk beds. According to this respondent, her accommodation was satisfactory, with clean and hygienic washrooms and amenities. The light and air circulation was adequate, and there were balconies/verandas and park-like sitting areas outside where workers could spend their free time. This respondent felt she had sufficient privacy, to speak on the phone about personal issues, for instance, and felt safe in the factory.</p>	<p>Two respondents indicated that they were provided with high quality housing. They lived with four others in a four-bedroom house, and each worker had their own private room. The house had several shared spaces including a lounge and a large kitchen. Notably, the accommodations provided to these respondents were atypical, and likely resulted from the fact that they were employed at a button factory with a very small overall workforce (fewer than 15 workers total).</p>

Most respondents ate daily meals at the facility cafeteria or at a cafeteria located at the worker housing. Some respondents were allowed to cook their own food in kitchens provided by the facility on the weekends when they weren't working – some of these were provided with allowances to provision their own food.

Five respondents indicated that the employer-provided food was of poor quality. Two respondents indicated that the meat and fish were of extremely poor quality – sometimes spoiled. One respondent indicated that she often had trouble eating upon first arriving to Mauritius because she found the food unpalatable. The quality of the food left her depressed until she began to cook her own food (this was allowed at her facility). One respondent reported a situation in which a Bangladeshi labor broker took control of the factory canteen and kitchen and began to supply substandard food to the workers, and pocketing some of the food budget for his own personal use. At this facility the respondent reported many issues with the food due to this mismanagement, indicating that the workers were fed low quality meat, rotten fish, and coarse, dusty grains. Workers' complaints were ignored and tensions rose until a physical altercation took place between some workers and the labor broker mismanaging the canteen/kitchen. Several workers were deported, but after several more rounds of complaints from workers the corrupt broker was removed from his position and the quality of food improved. Another respondent indicated that the quality of food deteriorated particularly during the lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the quality of food provided to workers is not directly linked to a risk of forced labor, poor quality food and housing both contribute to worker vulnerability and dissatisfaction. Furthermore, respondents reported that the quality of the food had a strong impact on

the overall quality of their experience in Mauritius and on their overall health and well-being while in the country.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Housing and Food

Mauritian law appears to mandate a very basic standard of housing quality for migrant workers. According to the Mauritian government’s publication “Know Your Rights: a guide for migrant workers in Mauritius,” employers must provide migrant workers with accommodation free of charge, “must cater for basic facilities for [the worker’s] comfortable stay,”⁹⁷ and provide workers with a bed with a mattress. Basic amenities must including washing facilities including soap and clean water, sanitary conveniences, potable water, facilities for first aid, and facilities for taking of meals.⁹⁸ Some respondents indicated that these basic needs were not met in the accommodation they were provided, and a majority indicated they were charged for accommodation.

While some respondents indicated that their employer-provided housing was satisfactory, several respondents described conditions which could be described as “degrading” living conditions.⁹⁹

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
work in degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party	N/A

Freedom of Movement

Respondents reported nightly curfews in the dormitory, and surveillance of workers through security guards and CCTV footage. Most respondents indicated little additional restriction of movement.

Respondents reported that there were some restrictions to their movements while at work. Typically they were required to stay in their production areas during the work day, but most indicated they were allowed to go to the bathroom or water fountain when they needed to. A few respondents indicated that management would yell or chastise workers for leaving their designated work areas. Some facilities had CCTV cameras in the production areas to monitor employees during working hours.

Thirteen of the respondents reported that they felt they had sufficient freedom of movement in the employer-provided housing. However, many respondents described policies and practices at the housing that limited their ability enter and exit freely. Three indicated that the gates outside the housing were kept locked during certain hours, especially overnight. One respondent indicated that the gate to the worker housing was locked from the outside and could only be opened by security staff. Two said there were guards posted outside the housing, and three reported either CCTV cameras or in-person surveillance of workers. Thirteen respondents indicated that there was either a curfew at the housing (e.g. They were prohibited from leaving the housing/compound after a certain hour, often 8 pm) or that they had to ask permission to leave the housing. Thus, while workers indicated acceptance of these security conditions in the housing, restrictions to freedom of movement were significant and widespread.

For example, one female respondent indicated that there were security guards at the gate of her employer-provided housing, and workers were only allowed to move in and out of the dorm at fixed schedules. The gates were open at 5pm, 7pm, and 8pm. After 8 pm, the gates were locked and no one

was allowed to enter or exit. The gate watchman kept the keys and kept a record of which workers entered and exited using a ledger. If there were any emergencies after hours, facility management would have to be called to deal with the situation (eg. call an ambulance). Routine checks were conducted at night to verify that all workers were in the dorm after hours.

The sample is too small to suggest any patterns with regard to gender and restriction of movements. Two of the five women respondents said they had freedom of movement in the housing, while eleven of the thirteen male respondents said they had freedom of movement. One male respondent indicated that he felt male workers had more relaxed entry and exit rules compared to female workers. Stakeholder interviews suggested that Bangladeshi women’s movements are particularly restricted, including by male Bangladeshi co-workers, due to cultural customs around gender as well as employers’ concerns about women workers’ safety. Women workers’ social and sexual behaviors are also policed by employers through surveillance and pregnancy testing (see “Pregnant Workers” section).

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Freedom of Movement

Overall, respondents reported relatively little restriction to their movement.

However, many reported that their personal documents were held by their employers. Withholding of foreign workers’ passports is inextricably linked to limited freedom of movement and communication, since workers are often unable to move around freely in foreign countries without their passports.

Employer withholding of worker personal documents also contradicts the guidance for migrant workers provided in the Mauritian government’s “Know Your Rights” document. The document states that the employer “has no right to retain [a worker’s] passport”¹⁰⁰ and indicates that the retention of travel documents or passports by employers is a warning sign of human trafficking.¹⁰¹ The guide also proposes that workers “not allow [their] employer to retain [their] passport.”¹⁰² However, vulnerable migrant workers may have limited ability to protest employer practices like document retention.

Related forced labor indicators	
Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
N/A	withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits)

Ability to Terminate the Employment Contract

Respondents almost unanimously reported that they could not end their employment contracts early without some kind of penalty. Penalties ranged from paying for their own return airfare, paying a fee to the employer, losing pay or other benefits owed, or losing personal documents withheld by the employer.

Sixteen of the 18 respondents indicated that there were barriers to leaving their jobs prior to the end of their three-year contracts. While six respondents indicated they felt it was possible to leave their jobs if they wanted to, four of those indicated that they could not leave without incurring financial penalties (namely, paying a fine or paying for their own return airfare). Of the two that said there were no barriers to quitting, one of them indicated an awareness that early termination fines/penalties and having to pay for return airfare were common issues facing garment factory workers in other companies (but was not an issue for him where he worked).

Twelve respondents said that they could not leave their jobs if they wanted to. Four reasons were most commonly cited by respondents:

1. Would have to pay penalty or cost of return airfare (12 respondents)
2. Would lose pay, benefits, bonuses, or savings funds (10 respondents)
3. Employer withholding documents (eight respondents)
4. Unable to leave due to outstanding debts associated with recruitment costs (three respondents)

All respondents indicated that they were impacted by at least two of these commonly cited barriers to quitting. Five cited three barriers, and two cited all four. One cited all four as well as some additional barriers (this respondent's story is described in the example below).

All twelve of those that said they could not quit their jobs if they wanted to said that a primary reason for their inability to leave was that they would be required to pay a fine or penalty to their employer, or they would be required to pay for their own return airfare.¹⁰³ Two respondents indicated that the employer would make them pay a BDT 100k penalty or "deposit" to cover their return airfare (about MUR 50,000, or USD 1,129). Several respondents estimated that the cost of return airfare that they would have to pay themselves ranged from MUR 15,000 to MUR 26,000 (approximately USD 339-587). Another respondent indicated that the employer would charge the worker for the return airfare but would quote an inflated rate, around BDT 75k, when the real cost of the ticket was closer to BDT 15k. In one case, a female worker who tried to end her contract early due to illness reported being "investigated" by the employer and was ultimately accused of pregnancy in an apparent attempt by the employer to avoid paying for her repatriation (as the employer felt that a worker's pregnancy was grounds for dismissal without providing return airfare).

The only opportunity to avoid paying either a fine or the return airfare cost, according to many workers, was a medical exemption. Respondents' employers reportedly did not consider family emergencies, including deaths of family members, as acceptable grounds for early contract termination without penalty. One female respondent indicated that a death in the family would serve as justification for her employer to release a worker from the contract without penalty only if the deceased family member was the worker's spouse, and then only if the worker provided photographic or video evidence of the deceased as proof. Another female respondent indicated that she wanted to return to Bangladesh after her mother became very depressed following her father's death. The company agreed to pay her the wages and benefits she was owed and cover her return airfare if she agreed to stay and work for another three months after her request. The respondent agreed, but the degree to which she could have reasonably consented in this situation is circumscribed by the threat of withheld wages and the cost of paying her own airfare.

Another barrier to quitting or terminating the contract early was the risk of losing benefits or pay owed to workers. Ten of the respondents indicated this was a reason they felt they could not end their contracts early. Several respondents indicated specifically that they would lose their "NPS" or "PRGF" savings (see forced savings section in "Deductions"). One indicated that she had not received her savings funds when she left Mauritius because she returned earlier than agreed due to illness. Another respondent said that he collected the fund once, but was prohibited from collecting it on a second trip to Mauritius due to interference by his employer in retribution for the respondent's outspoken comments about working conditions and pay.

Ten respondents said that their employer held their identity documents (passport) and/of visa or other personal documents.¹⁰⁴ Most workers indicated they could access their documents if they needed them (eg. to purchase a sim card or deal with banking activities). Five said that they were concerned about

possibly losing their documents during their time working in Mauritius. Several respondents (8) said that they would have difficulty obtaining their documents if they wished to end their employment early, and cited this as another reason they could not quit their jobs. Three respondents said it was difficult to get the employer to “cooperate” with workers hoping to end their contracts early, including getting them to release their documents to them. Two said that their employer would have sent their passports and other personal documents including visa paperwork to immigration authorities in the event that they attempted to end their contracts early. One said the fact that the factory held migrant workers’ documents meant that it was impossible for them to arrange their own air tickets. Another said that they had no leverage to negotiate early contract termination because management withheld their documents. One indicated that a worker’s documents could be obtained from the employer in the event of early contract termination only if the worker provided one month’s notice and paid a fine.

Most workers (16/18) said they had never been threatened with dismissal or deportation directly, but several mentioned awareness of this tactic in the sector or in their workplaces. The same proportion indicated they had never received any threats of violence from their employer. However, one respondent indicated he had been threatened and harassed by the Bangladeshi recruitment agency that facilitated his employment in Mauritius after he ended his contract early. The agency called him repeatedly and threatened he would lose his passport, become undocumented (and therefore be imprisoned in Mauritius), and be fined or held liable for financing his own return airfare. The agency also made efforts to locate the worker’s family address in Bangladesh, a tactic which frightened and intimidated the respondent.

In one extreme case, a respondent indicated he and his co-workers were threatened by their employer with a series of serious repercussions if they tried to end their contracts early. The respondent was told that repercussions included being reported to the police or sent to jail, and being required to pay for their own airfare (the cost of which management inflated to extreme estimates as high as BDT 75k) and having to sacrifice benefits and due wages. The respondent described the employer’s tactics as “mental torture.” Because the management withheld all workers’ documents, workers felt they had no leverage to negotiate with management. Several times when co-workers wanted to return to Bangladesh due to a family emergency, the respondent and his co-workers raised funds among amongst themselves because the employer refused to pay for return airfare. This respondent also reported he had heard that a Mauritius-based Bangladeshi labor agent routinely sent local “goons” to physically assault misbehaving workers.

Forced Labor Vulnerability Analysis: Ability to terminate the employment contract

Almost all respondents indicated they could not terminate their employment contracts early without some kind of financial penalty. The most frequently cited penalty was a fine or payment associated with return airfare. Limited ability to terminate a work contract is an indicator of involuntary work. Respondents also feared losing their personal documents or wages or benefits owed to them if they terminated their contracts early; these are indicators of threat or menace of penalty.

Preventing workers from terminating their work contracts early also appears to contravene Mauritian national policy. According to the Mauritian government’s publication “Know Your Rights: a guide for migrant workers in Mauritius,” employers are obligated to pay for a migrant worker’s return airfare in all cases, including “at the expiry of [the] work permit or early termination of [the] contract of employment or for any cause whatsoever.”¹⁰⁵

Related forced labor indicators

Involuntary work:	Threat or menace of penalty:
work with no or limited freedom to terminate work contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits) abuse of workers' vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report focuses on qualitative analysis of the nature and experience of forced labor vulnerability among returned migrant workers from Bangladesh that worked in the garment sector of Mauritius. The report did not seek to identify individual cases of forced labor or make a determination about the prevalence or systemic nature of forced labor risk in the garment sector of Mauritius, but rather sought to gain insight in to the nature and characteristics of forced labor vulnerability. Verité utilized the ILO's forced labor indicator framework as a mechanism for identifying risk and vulnerability to forced labor in the study population. Verité's analysis detected 12 forced labor indicators among workers interviewed, including six "involuntary work" indicators, and six indicators of "threat or menace of penalty".¹⁰⁶ An additional labor rights concern, forced pregnancy testing and dismissal and deportation of pregnant workers, was also identified.

Forced labor indicators were identified in multiple aspects of both recruitment and employment for Bangladeshi migrant workers in the garment sector of Mauritius. The indicators of forced labor identified in recruitment practices included:

- Situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person's consent;
- debt bondage or manipulation of debt; and
- threats or violence against workers' families and relatives, or close associates.

The indicators of forced labor identified in employment practices included:

- work with no or limited freedom to terminate contract;
- abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer;
- work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment;
- work in degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party; work with very low or no wages;
- withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits);
- withholding of wages or other promised benefits; abuse of workers' vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation;
- restrictions on workers' movement; and threats or violence against workers or workers' families and relatives, or close associates.

Appendix 3 summarizes the findings by related indicator and includes the level of frequency of the finding and the primary source of risk identified by the research (recruitment practices, employment practices, or both).

While respondents often reflected that Mauritius was a relatively better place to work when compared to other common destinations for Bangladeshi migrant workers, their experiences reveal obvious forced labor indicators and other labor risks in their recruitment and employment experiences.

Further research and engagement on forced labor vulnerability and other labor rights issues facing migrant workers in the garment sector of Mauritius is recommended. While robust recommendations are beyond the scope and mandate of this report, efforts to address the underlying causes of forced labor vulnerability in the Mauritius garment sector will clearly be needed to address these significant risks. Verité hopes that the findings herein will provide a platform of understanding from which concrete actions can be taken by government, business, labor union, and civil society stakeholders alike to combat the abuses suffered by migrant workers in the garment sector.

Multinational companies sourcing garments from Mauritius should take active steps in line with the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment & Footwear Sector to identify and cease, prevent and mitigate any harm associated with forced labor vulnerability in their Mauritius supply chains. The Government of Mauritius should support research to better understand labor vulnerabilities and particularly vulnerability to forced labor in its garment sector and commit to engagement with key stakeholders to formulate policy approaches to address and remediate identified labor vulnerabilities.

Specifically, Verité proposes a two-pronged recommendation for the government of Mauritius:

- 1) Coordinate and convene a variety of modes of sustainable dialogue involving key stakeholders from multiple realms (government, civil society, labor unions, private sector, international organizations, foreign government representatives) and key countries (Bangladesh, Madagascar, and other countries sending workers to the garment sector of Mauritius), to determine how best to address and remediate labor vulnerabilities. Verité recommends that the government of Mauritius assign an appropriate government body, such as the the National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons, or the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment and Training, with the support of the ILO, to oversee this process. The oversight body should set up goals and objectives, oversee dialogue sessions, and ensure follow-up.
- 2) Support more research into key issues facing garment sector workers in Mauritius, including on the following themes:
 - a. Workforce demographics, including key countries of origin and migration pathways
 - b. Recruitment practices in key corridors, including the roles of Mauritian-based and country of origin-based intermediaries, addressing employers at multiple scales (including small, medium, and large firms, as well as subcontracting facilities)
 - c. Hours and salaries among workers, including how overtime hours and rates shape worker take-home pay
 - d. Harassment, targeting, and discriminatory treatment of workers that voice concerns in the workplace, women workers, and pregnant workers
 - e. Provision of medical care to seriously ill workers

Appendix 1: Methodology

Interviewing “Returned” Workers

This research was designed to explore the technique of gathering information on forced labor vulnerability from migrant workers who have returned to their home country and the nature and value of information that is able to be gathered through this method. Conducting interviews with returned workers (as opposed to those still in the destination country) has both benefits and drawbacks. Workers who have returned to their home country may feel more comfortable speaking openly about their experiences, compared to workers who are still employed as contract workers in a foreign context, who may be working in conditions of vulnerability. However, some workers may have difficulty recalling some of the specific details of their employment circumstances in a given host country, depending on how long ago they returned from overseas. Verité has found that research focused in communities of origin can uncover and better illuminate evidence of labor abuses that may go undetected by workplace-based investigations.

During the course of the field research in Bangladesh, interviewers found that most respondents were able to recall ample details of their experiences and were candid with their responses. They were willing to share concerns they had about the recruitment process and in the workplace, subjects which may have been uncomfortable to discuss if the participants had still been located in Mauritius (and therefore still dependent on their employers for their incomes and immigration status). Of course, interviewing returned workers does not mitigate all worker vulnerability. Some respondents felt they were still vulnerable even having returned to Bangladesh, due to the transnational interconnections of labor brokers and overseas employers, and their continued dependence upon foreign contract work for their livelihood. Some workers indicated concern that their participation in the research could have repercussions for them (including being blacklisted for future foreign contract work opportunities) especially if local labor intermediaries discovered they had cooperated with the research.

Human Subjects Protection Protocol

In light of the vulnerability of research participants, Verité developed a human subjects protection protocol which was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of NORC. All participants went through an informed consent process during which they were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and how the information might be used. All of those interviewed consented to the interview. For security purposes, the names of all workers and expert interviewees have been kept anonymous.

Research Tools

Based on the objectives of the Rapid Sector Appraisal, a detailed structured data collection tool was created with 90 core questions and a significant number of probing and follow-up questions in the following topical sections:

- Basic respondent personal and demographic information
- Place of work in Mauritius
- Recruitment actors and job-related debt
- Transparency of job terms
- Conditions of work
- Hours and seasonality
- Wages

- Humane treatment, threats and menace of penalty
- Freedom of movement
- Freedom to terminate employment
- Housing
- Stakeholder interactions, affiliations, and direct-action history

The structured data collection tool was used to create a short-form semi-structured qualitative interview tool which was used to guide interviews with respondents in the field. Both research tools were translated into Bangla by Bangladesh-based Verité field research partner SHEVA.

Data Analysis

As the interviews were conducted in Bangla, and all primary data records were written in Bangla, SHEVA researchers conducted a first phase of translation and coding. They used interview notes and recordings to produce two English language data documents for each interview: 1) a completed structured data collection tool and 2) a narrative interview summary. The SHEVA team also produced a field research report describing their methodological reflections and key observations, and conducted five interviews with relevant stakeholders in Bangladesh, including a recruitment agent, a subagent (field broker or “dalal”), a journalist, and two representatives of rights-based NGOs (information from stakeholder interviews is referenced, where relevant, to corroborate findings from the worker interviews). To analyze the data, Verité pulled data from the structured data collection tool into an analysis matrix in MS Excel. Respondents’ answers to interview questions were tabulated and compared, and where relevant, patterns related to gender, type of work, and other variables were examined. After this initial analysis phase, the narrative interview summaries were reviewed to cross-check the information provided in the structured data collection tool, and to identify important findings that were not fully captured by the structured tool. The narrative interview summaries were also used to write up the case studies and detailed examples used in the report.

The draft report was then reviewed by the field research team to confirm that the analysis and write-up accurately reflect the key findings observed in the field.

Appendix 2: Detailed Respondent Demographics

Participants ranged between 26 and 40 years of age, and included five women and 13 men. Eleven participants were married at the time of the interview. Most participants had either no children (seven respondents) or one child (seven respondents). The remaining had two (three respondents) or three (one respondent).

Respondent education levels varied.

Level of education	# of respondents	Gender
No formal education	1	Female
Some elementary	5	4 Female, 1 Male
Finished elementary	2	Male
Some junior high	1	Male
Graduated junior high	4	Male
Some high school	4	Male
Graduated secondary school	1	Male

One respondent indicated they were fully fluent in Mauritian Creole, having learned the language during their time working in Mauritius. Seven said they knew “a little” Mauritian Creole, and the rest indicated they spoke Bangla and spoke some Hindi. A few were also fully fluent in Hindi.

Interviewees shared the names of the 11 companies where they worked (respectively) in Mauritius, but in order to protect the confidentiality of respondents the names of companies are not shared here. Within the sample, multiple respondents reported having worked at four of the companies (Companies A, B, C, and D). Four respondents reported having worked at Company A, four at Company B, two at Company C, and another two at Company D. For the remaining seven companies where respondents reported having worked, only one respondent indicated having worked at each of them. Several respondents had worked for more than one company in Mauritius. All respondents indicated the employer they expected to work for based on the recruitment process was the same employer they actually worked for upon arrival to Mauritius. The factories where respondents worked each specialized in certain types of garment production, representing a wide range of clothing items including: t-shirts, shirts, polo shirts, jackets, pants, denim pants and shirts, woven shirts, trousers, buttons, and shirt collars. Respondents had little information about where the products they made ended up, or who purchased them. But they were aware that the end products were being sent to a wide range of international destinations, including: The United States, Italy, France, England, Bangladesh, China, South Africa, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Japan, India, Madagascar, Tanzania, as well as to other factories in Mauritius (the latter scenario was most typical in the case of subcontracted facilities).

The jobs respondents reported carrying out while in Mauritius included:

- Sewing Machine Operator (general)
 - Sample department sewing machine operator
 - Flat lock sewing machine operator
- Ironing/finishing (came on a machine operator visa)
- Button machine operation and maintenance
- Cook

Two respondents reported working at small-scale factories with between 5 and 15 total workers. Most of the interviewees’ former employers had more than 500 workers. Five of the respondents’ former

employers had 500-1000 workers, seven had 1000-3000 workers, and three had between 8,000 and 10,000 workers, according to interviewees. Interviewees' employers were located in four districts of Mauritius including Port Louis and Plaines Wilhems, where much of the garment sector is concentrated, as well as outlying districts (not shared here for confidentiality purposes).

Appendix 3: Summary of Related Forced Labor Indicators

The following chart summarizes case study findings by indicator, and includes the level of frequency of the finding and the primary source of risk identified by the research (recruitment practices, employment practices, or both).

Involuntary Work: Findings, Frequency, and Source of Risk:

Indicator	# Respondents	Finding	Primary source of risk
Work with no or limited freedom to terminate contract	Many	Respondents unable to terminate their contracts early due to financial penalty, loss of personal documents, or loss of wages or benefits owed.	Employment practices
Situations in which the worker must perform a job of different nature from that specified during recruitment without a person's consent	Many	Respondents reported that the actual working conditions and job terms they found on arrival to Mauritius were different from those that were explained to them during the recruitment process.	Recruitment practices
Abusive requirements for overtime or on-call work that were not previously agreed with the employer	Some	Many respondents indicated they had worked in excess of Mauritian limits to overtime hours	Employment practices
Work in hazardous conditions to which the worker has not consented, with or without compensation or protective equipment	Some	Most respondents indicated they were unable to refuse to do work that they felt was unsafe.	Employment practices
Work in degrading living conditions imposed by the employer, recruiter, or other third party	Some	Some respondents reported living in poorly maintained, overcrowded housing with inadequate hygiene facilities	Employment practices
Work with very low or no wages	Few	Some respondents indicated they were paid wages likely below Mauritian minimum wage during the time they worked in Mauritius. Some were not paid overtime rates for overtime work	Employment practices

Threat or Menace of Penalty: Findings, Frequency, and Source of Risk

Indicator	Frequency	Finding	Primary Source of Risk
withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits)	Many	Some employers withheld respondents' passports or visa paperwork. Some respondents feared losing documents if they terminated their contracts early.	Employment practices
Debt bondage or manipulation of debt	Many	Respondents took out large loans to finance high recruitment fees and associated costs, and had difficulty paying off loans in a timely fashion	Recruitment practices
withholding of wages or other promised benefits	Some	Respondents indicated due wages or other benefits could be withheld if workers terminated contracts early. Punitive deductions contrary to Mauritian law were reported.	Employment practices
abuse of workers' vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation	Some	Inadequate medical care provided for seriously ill workers. Targeting, punitive wage deductions, and sometimes threats of dismissal or deportation used to penalize workers for speaking up.	Employment practices
restrictions on workers' movement	Some	workers reported nightly curfews in the dormitory; in many cases employers withheld respondents' personal documents, effectively restricting their ability to leave.	Employment practices
threats or violence against workers or workers' families and relatives, or close associates	Few	In a very small number of cases respondents indicated being threatened by employers or recruiting agents for speaking up about employment issues	Recruitment and employment practices

Appendix 4 – Narrative Case Study

An Experience of a Bangladeshi Garment Worker in Mauritius

The above comparison of the recruitment and employment experiences of the respondents illustrate several cross-cutting themes. But they do not capture the experiential dimensions of how the recruitment and employment processes unfold for individual workers. The story of one respondent, Deeba, highlights the various motivations, fears, frustrations that migrant workers experience in labor migration, which in turn help to better understand the social and personal factors that drive migrant worker vulnerability to forced labor and other labor rights violations in the Mauritian garment sector.

Deeba¹⁰⁷, a woman in her late twenties from a peri-urban area near Dhaka, initially decided to go overseas for work when she was 21 years old due to her family's financial situation. Neither she nor her husband earned adequate incomes, and they struggled to make ends meet and provide for their infant son. At the time, Deeba was working in a local garment factory outside of Dhaka when her brother-in-law Aakash approached Deeba's parents and proposed that they send her to Mauritius to work in garment manufacturing. Aakash told Deeba's parents that she could earn a substantial income in Mauritius, and shared that it was a safe country for her to travel to. Deeba's parents encouraged her to consider the proposition, considering her and her husband's financial troubles.

Initially Deeba felt scared to make the decision to travel to Mauritius because she had never left Bangladesh before. She had also heard of unnerving stories of human trafficking, and feared for her own safety. However, her family's dire financial state drove her to accept these risks and pursue foreign contract work. She contacted Aakash for assistance with getting her passport, a necessary first step in the process. This cost her BDT 5k.

Aakash connected Deeba with a local labor subagent (referred to as a "dalal" or "field broker"), who informed her that the recruitment fee for the particular company to which she was being sent to work was BDT 60,000, a sum she was certainly not able to pay herself given her family's financial situation. In order to finance the cost of recruitment, Deeba's father decided to leverage their most precious asset – the ancestral land on which their home was built. He pawned the land to a local money lender in exchange for BDT 70,000. The interest rate on the loan was BDT 2,000 per month.

Aakash also brought Deeba to the recruiting agency's office for the required "interview" process, during which she was asked to demonstrate her skills operating a sewing machine. She passed.

Deeba then used the funds from her father's loan to pay the subagent the required BDT 60,000 in two installments of BDT 30,000 each. She made the first payment before her visa was issued, and the second after the plane ticket was issued. These payments covered the total cost of recruitment, including the mandatory medical exam, blood and urine tests, and biometrics.

Deeba's visa was issued three months after she passed the labor agent's interview process. One month after her visa was issued she received her plane ticket and signed her contract, which was written in Bangla. Although Deeba was allowed to review the contract (contrary to most respondents' experiences) she could not read and therefore could not understand the contract herself. Fortunately, Aakash read it to her and explained the terms and conditions. Deeba was particularly pleased that the contract indicated her employer would provide food and accommodation free of cost. Two weeks after

signing the contract, she departed for Mauritius. The BDT 10,000 that remained from her father's loan Deeba brought with her to Mauritius as a contingency fund.

Deeba felt deeply burdened by the responsibility of the loan her father had taken using their ancestral land as collateral, as it made her parents' household financially insecure. Before she left for Mauritius her parents gave her a "pep talk" in which they encouraged her to "deal" with whatever life abroad brought her, even if it was difficult, because the responsibility of retaining their ancestral land was squarely on her shoulders.

When it was time for her to depart, the recruiting agency provided transportation to the airport. Deeba was very nervous about the process of getting through the airport, so Aakash accompanied her up to the passport control. From there on Deeba joined a group of 29 other women all heading to work for the same company. Being with a big group of future co-workers allayed some of Deeba's anxiety, and she followed the group closely on their long journey through Saudi Arabia to Mauritius.

Deeba and her co-workers arrived to Mauritius at night. They were picked up by two representatives from the factory, including a Mauritian and a Bangladeshi national – the "Bangladeshi team leader." They were delivered to the worker dormitory and instructed to report to work the next morning.

On her first full day in Mauritius, the factory management asked her about her experience with different types of machines and assigned her to one of the sewing operations. Her first day she was let go early and returned to the dorm to rest.

Unfortunately, as time went on, Deeba realized that her work arrangement was not going to be as it was promised by the labor agents in Bangladesh. Though she had been promised a monthly salary of MUR 8,000-10,000, Deeba worked very few hours during the first nine months to one year, and earned just MUR 2,000-2,500 monthly, far below the Mauritian minimum wage. The Bangladeshi labor agent later told her that this was no different from what she had agreed to, rather, the pay was based on piece rates so the discrepancy in pay was based on her production output.

At this point, Deeba realized that she had been deceived. For the first several months she was distraught and worried about her son, who she missed terribly. She had trouble eating because she could not adjust to the type of food they offered her at the factory. Eventually she began to cook food for herself in her dormitory (a practice allowed by some, but not all, Mauritian employers). This gave her a sense of satisfaction and control, and improved her outlook on her situation. But it did not address her main concern – her continued inability to pay off her debt. To deal with the anxiety and stress of the situation, Deeba spoke with her friends and co-workers, many of whom shared similar circumstances. She also sought their direct assistance with managing her debt, by borrowing money (from four co-workers on four different occasions) to pay off the money lender in Bangladesh. She felt the terms of repaying her friends were much preferable to continuing to leave her family's ancestral land vulnerable to loss as debt collateral.

Eventually Deeba was told that she could switch departments to work in a higher-paid area. Her salary increased first to MUR 4,000. After about nine months her salary increased to the promised MUR 8,000 to 10,000 (USD 188 – 235) per month. But by this time, the exchange rate between Bangladeshi taka and Mauritian rupees had become less favorable, so the impact of her overall increase in salary was somewhat mitigated. Nevertheless, the salary increase enabled her to pay back the friends from whom she had borrowed money to pay off the Bangladeshi money lender.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new source of stress in Deeba's life. Workers started receiving panicked phone calls from their worried families back home in Bangladesh, where they learned that COVID was spreading all over the world, and how migrant workers everywhere were feeling the brunt of the lockdown. Rumors spread through the workforce of COVID-19 positive workers going missing or being locked in their factories for weeks without treatment. As a result, Deeba and her co-workers were terrified of what would happen to them if they contracted COVID. Even though the factory management told workers they had made provisions to treat workers for COVID in isolation, the idea of factory-imposed isolation only added to their distress and fear.

Deeba's salary plummeted to around MUR 2,000 per month due to a lack of work. The quality of the factory-provided food deteriorated during this time and Deeba finally decided she didn't want to stay in Mauritius anymore. After three months of earning only her basic wage and having virtually no work, Deeba requested to be sent home. Management resisted her request, and Deeba had to convince them to let her go by making up a false story that her husband was very ill. Finally, they released her, and she traveled back to Bangladesh with 19 of her co-workers. In all, she spent seven years living and working in Mauritius.

Overall, upon reflection Deeba felt that her overall experience in Mauritius was disappointing, and had had mixed outcomes. While she had gone to Mauritius with the intention of improving her financial situation, the stress of living with her debt burden, especially during the first several months of her time in Mauritius and during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was difficult to live with. Ultimately, she felt she had reaped some reward from the experience. She was able to pay off the loan to safeguard the status of her family's ancestral land, and was even able to finance building a house on the land, which has given her a sense of security and social status. The extreme financial struggles she experienced before leaving for Mauritius were resolved, but she didn't have much in the way of savings.

At the time of the interview, Deeba was interested in returning to Mauritius to work in the garment sector. However, she insisted that she did not want to work with the same company, and hoped to avoid labor intermediaries altogether. Instead she planned to use the knowledge and experience she gained from her first trip to arrange her own travel and employment. She also planned to bring along her brother-in-law, Aakash, who was so instrumental in helping her travel to Mauritius the first time.

Deeba's story reveals how many Bangladeshi migrant workers are pushed to accept undesirable terms of recruitment and employment due to their precarious economic situation and lack of viable employment alternatives. It also shows how social networks operating between Bangladesh and Mauritius, involving both family and friends as well as formal and informal labor agents, encourage and facilitate migration for work in the Mauritian garment sector. Her story illustrates the key role that indebtedness plays in constraining workers' options once the recruitment process has begun. It also shows how access to reliable information about the terms of employment is often extremely limited, and often distorted by labor agents and subagents. Even though Deeba had a trusted person helping her navigate the process, she was still deceived and ultimately earned less than she was promised upon arrival to Mauritius. Her story also illustrates how migrant workers hope to leverage their past experiences with labor migration in order to minimize costs and vulnerabilities.

Deeba's experience also illuminates the importance of quality food and housing for worker satisfaction, as well as the role Mauritian garment sector employers can play in creating and exploiting migrant

workers' vulnerability (e.g., when she had to "convince" her employer to let her return to Bangladesh amidst the instability of the COVID-19 pandemic).

Endnotes

¹ In this report the term "migrant workers" is used broadly to refer to workers who come from other countries to work in a host/destination country, regardless of visa or contract status. However, all of the respondents who participated in interviews for this report might also be referred to as "foreign contract workers" due to their status as contracted temporary guestworkers with visas provided by the Mauritian government. Mauritian government documents use "migrant worker" or in some cases "expatriate worker" to refer to these foreign worker populations.

² ILO (2018). Guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labour. 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva 10-19 October 2018. ICLS/20/2018/Guidelines.

³ The sample was diverse in terms of gender and age (five women, 13 men; between 26 and 40 years of age). The respondents had work experience at 11 different companies located in four different districts in Mauritius, and most worked at factories with large workforces (all but two respondents indicated working at facilities with more than 500 workers). Most respondents were skilled garment workers who were employed in Mauritius as sewing machine operators.

⁴ Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour. International Labour Office, Department of Statistics. 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, Oct 2018. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/-stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648619.pdf.

⁵ USD conversion calculated using the exchange rate from the respondent's year of departure from Bangladesh.

⁶ This number is derived from the total amount of debt reported by each respondent divided by each respondent's reported average monthly salary.

⁷ Respondents were not able to explain the savings programs with much specificity. For more discussion of the savings program's respondents discussed, see the "Forced Savings" section in the "Employment in Mauritius" section below.

⁸ In this report the term "migrant workers" is used broadly to refer to workers who come from other countries to work in a host/destination country, regardless of visa or contract status. However, all of the respondents who participated in interviews for this report might also be referred to as "foreign contract workers" due to their status as contracted temporary guestworkers with visas provided by the Mauritian government. Mauritian government documents use "migrant worker" or in some cases "expatriate worker" to refer to these foreign worker populations.

⁹ "2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius." *U.S. Department of State*, www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/mauritius/;

"2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius." *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>;

"2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius." *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>; <https://www.industrialunion.org/centre-to-curb-migrant-worker-exploitation-opened-in-mauritius/>;

<https://www.industrialunion.org/union-takes-mauritian-employer-to-court-after-migrant-workers-dies/>;

<https://www.industrialunion.org/migrant-resource-centre-protects-migrant-workers-in-mauritius-against-exploitation/>;

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mauritius/>;

"Textile : Les Employés D'Akhilesh International Sans Salaire." *Business Mega*, 9 Mar. 2020, business.mega.mu/2020/03/09/textile-les-employes-dakhilesh-international-sans-salaire/.

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- ¹⁰ Stakeholders consulted include three representatives of international organizations/NGOs, two representatives of global brands who source from Mauritius, and one independent consultant
- ¹¹ ILO (2018). Guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labour. 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva 10-19 October 2018. ICLS/20/2018/Guidelines.
- ¹² Ramasamy, Jaysen Kovalen. "The contribution of the EPZ to the economic growth of Mauritius." Doctoral thesis, University of the Witwatersrand. 2015, <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/18794>. Accessed Aug 12 2021.
- ¹³ "Table 3 – Employment by product group and sex, EOE Sector, September 2020 – September 2021." (Excel data file), *Statistics Mauritius*, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/Manufacturing/EOE/EOE_3Qtr21.aspx.
- ¹⁴ Joomun, Gilles. "The Textile and Clothing Industry in Mauritius." *The Future of the Textile and Clothing Industry in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Ed. by Herbert Jauch and Rudolf Traub-Merz. Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2006. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/03796/14mauritius.pdf>. Accessed 12 Aug 2021.
- Brand stakeholder consultation 1
- Brand stakeholder consultation 2
- ¹⁵ "19. External Trade." *Mauritius in Figures 2020*, Statistics Mauritius, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, August 2021, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/By_Subject/Other/SB_Other.aspx.
- ¹⁶ Conversions to USD were made in March 2022 using xe.com
- ¹⁷ "Table 3 - Gross Value Added by Industry Group at Current Basic Prices, 2018 – 2021." National Accounts Estimates 2018-2020, *Statistics Mauritius*, Dec. 2021, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/National_Accounts/NA/NAE_Dec21.aspx.
- ¹⁸ "19. External Trade." *Mauritius in Figures 2020*, Statistics Mauritius, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, August 2021, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/By_Subject/Other/SB_Other.aspx.
- ¹⁹ Stakeholder consultation
- ²⁰ Joomun, Gilles. "The Textile and Clothing Industry in Mauritius." *The Future of the Textile and Clothing Industry in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Ed. by Herbert Jauch and Rudolf Traub-Merz. Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2006. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/03796/14mauritius.pdf>. Accessed 12 Aug 2021.
- ²¹ "Table 3 – Employment by product group and sex, EOE Sector, September 2020 – September 2021." (Excel data file), *Statistics Mauritius*, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/Manufacturing/EOE/EOE_3Qtr21.aspx.
- ²² "Table 3 – Employment by product group and sex, EOE Sector, September 2020 – September 2021." (Excel data file), *Statistics Mauritius*, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/Manufacturing/EOE/EOE_3Qtr21.aspx.
- ²³ The Mauritian government data we reference here refers to this group of workers as "expatriates" rather than "migrant" workers.
- ²⁴ "Table 5 - Expatriate Employment by Product Group and Sex, EOE Sector, September 2020-September 2021." (Excel data file), *Statistics Mauritius*, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/Manufacturing/EOE/EOE_3Qtr21.aspx.
- ²⁵ "Table 5 - Expatriate Employment by Product Group and Sex, EOE Sector, September 2020-September 2021." (Excel data file), *Statistics Mauritius*, https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Pages/Statistics/ESI/Manufacturing/EOE/EOE_3Qtr21.aspx.
- ²⁶ Stakeholder consultations.
- ²⁷ Stakeholder consultation.
- ²⁸ From: Republic of Mauritius, Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training. "Table 35 - Number of Valid Work Permits by Country of Origin & Sex, as of End October 2020." *Employment Service Monthly Bulletin October 2020*. <https://mauritiusjobs.govmu.org/statistics>.
- ²⁹ "Overseas Employment and Remittances from 1976-2021 (up to May)," *Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)*. <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>, Accessed 11 Aug 2021.

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- ³⁰ “Overseas Employment and Remittances from 1976-2021 (up to May),” *Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)*. <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>, Accessed 11 Aug 2021.
- ³¹ “Overseas Employment and Remittances from 1976-2021 (up to May),” *Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)*. <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>, Accessed 11 Aug 2021.
- ³² “Overseas Employment and Remittances from 1976-2022 (up to February),” *Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment, Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)*. <http://www.old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>, Accessed 24 Mar 2022.
- ³³ “2019 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/mauritius.
- “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>.
- ³⁴ “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>.
- ³⁵ “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>.
- ³⁶ “2020 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>.
- ³⁷ “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Mauritius.” *U.S. Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>
- ³⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mauritius/>
- ³⁹ <https://www.industrialunion.org/centre-to-curb-migrant-worker-exploitation-opened-in-mauritius/>;
<https://www.industrialunion.org/union-takes-mauritian-employer-to-court-after-migrant-workers-dies>
<https://www.industrialunion.org/migrant-resource-centre-protects-migrant-workers-in-mauritius-against-exploitation>
- ⁴⁰ Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr. In response to public criticism, some suppliers have reportedly taken corrective action to try to limit the negative impact of recruitment mechanisms on foreign workers. (Institute for Human Rights & Business. *Fees and IDs: Tackling Recruitment Fees and Confiscation of Workers’ Passports*. 2013, www.ihrb.org/pdf/2013-09-06_IHRB_Fees-and-IDs-Report.pdf.; Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr.)
- ⁴¹ In July 2018 Lexpress reported that a textile factory in Calebasses was found by the Industrial Court to have failed to “credit a worker with a full amount of remuneration for work done” (under the Employment Rights Act). A fine of Rs 1,500 for each of 16 charges was levied against the company. (Peerbaye, Nafiisah. “Salaire Minimum Non-Payé: Une Compagnie Textile ÉCope D’Une Amende de Rs 24 000.” *Lexpress.mu*, 13 July 2018, business.mega.mu/2018/07/16/salaire-minimum-non-paye-une-compagnie-textile-ecope-dune-amende-de-rs-24-000.) Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr.
- In July 2019 the Dhaka Tribune reported that Tex Knits Garments failed to pay 180 workers, including 65 Bangladeshi workers, for two months, citing a lack of work orders. An employee told the reporter that the company had cut off the electricity and water supply lines in the dormitory where they lived. (Raju, Fazlur Rahman. “65 Bangladeshi Garment Workers in Mauritius Spending Days Without Food and Shelter.” *Dhaka Tribune*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2019/07/23/65-bangladeshi-garment-workers-in-mauritius-spending-days-without-food-and-shelter>.)
- ⁴² In January 2016 Lexpress reported that the Ministry of Labor investigated two foreign worker dormitories in Terre-Rouge, and allegedly found inhospitable living conditions. (La Redaction. “Dortoirs Mal Entretenus: Le

Ministère du Travail Enquête.” *Lexpress.mu*, 14 Jan. 2016, www.lexpress.mu/article/274265/dortoirs-mal-entretenus-ministere-travail-enquete.) Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr. In July 2019 the Dhaka Tribune reported that Tex Knits Garments failed to pay 180 workers, including 65 Bangladeshi workers, for two months, citing a lack of work orders. An employee told the reporter that the company had cut off the electricity and water supply lines in the dormitory where they lived. (Raju, Fazlur Rahman. “65 Bangladeshi Garment Workers in Mauritius Spending Days Without Food and Shelter.” *Dhaka Tribune*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2019/07/23/65-bangladeshi-garment-workers-in-mauritius-spending-days-without-food-and-shelter>.) In 2019 it was reported that migrant workers at Akhilesh International were also reportedly sleeping in dormitories that consisted of “a stable in the middle of cane fields.” (Clair, Doreck. “Mauvais Traitements Allégués: 36 Travailleurs Étrangers Changent D’Employeur.” *Lexpress.mu*, 29 Jan. 2019, www.lexpress.mu/photos/346755/mauvais-traitements-allegues-36-travailleurs-etrangers-changent-demployeur.)⁴³ In May, 2008, IPS Correspondents reported on dismal working conditions of foreign workers in export processing zones in Mauritius. The article described several labor concerns, including intolerable living conditions, repression of protest and unionizing, low wages, and deportation as punishment for labor organizing, among other issues. (Ackbarally, Nasseem. “RIGHTS-MAURITIUS: “‘We Are Not Animals,’” Say Foreign Workers.” *Inter Press Service*, 30 May 2008, www.ipsnews.net/2008/05/rights-mauritius-lsquolsquowe-are-not-animalsrsquorsquo-say-foreign-workers.) Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr. Newell, Claire, and Robert Winnett. “Revealed: Topshop Clothes Made With ‘Slave Labour.’” *The Times & The Sunday Times* [Port Louis, Mauritius], 12 Aug. 2007, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revealed-topshop-clothes-made-with-slave-labour-mjzmq2bfwxr.

⁴⁴ Dias, Malsiri, and Leelangi Wanasundera. *Sri Lankan Migrant Garment Factory Workers: Mauritius and Sultanate of Oman*. HIVOS, Netherlands, 2002, www.actnewsrilanka.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sri-Lankan-Migrant-Garment-Factory-Workers-Mauritius-and-Sultanate-of-Oman.pdf.

⁴⁵ “Textile : Les Employés D’Akhilesh International Sans Salaire.” *Business Mega*, 9 Mar. 2020, business.mega.mu/2020/03/09/textile-les-employes-dakhilesh-international-sans-salaire.

⁴⁶ “Textile : Les Employés D’Akhilesh International Sans Salaire.” *Business Mega*, 9 Mar. 2020, business.mega.mu/2020/03/09/textile-les-employes-dakhilesh-international-sans-salaire. Another complicating factor for migrant workers in the garment sector of Mauritius is their legal status. As guest workers they are “tied” to their employers, and their permission to remain in the country is contingent upon their continued employment with the same employer who requested them. As such, they are not free to leave their designated employer to seek work elsewhere (“About Us.” Passport and Immigration Office, passport.govmu.org/English/Residence%20Permit/Pages/Employment.aspx. Accessed 25 June 2021. See Hein, Philippe. “Options for Migration Policies in the Long Term Development of Mauritius.” International Labor Organization. 2004, http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_201590.pdf. Accessed 12 Aug 2021. A “Know Your Rights” pamphlet distributed to migrant workers by the Mauritian government indicates that in exceptional circumstances relevant authorities may grant the transfer of a work permit to another employer. (“Know Your Rights: A Guide for Migrant Workers in Mauritius.” Republic of Mauritius, <https://humanrights.govmu.org/Documents/HumanRightsAwareness/pamphlets/English.pdf>)

⁴⁷ Compensation was offered to the respondent who participated from Mauritius over the phone. However, he opted not to receive compensation. During the interview process field researchers observed participants’ responses for signs of coaching, and a few participants’ responses were discarded due to suspected coaching. These participants were also given the BDT 500 compensation provided to all other Bangladesh-based participants.

⁴⁸ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648619.pdf

⁴⁹ Employment Rights Act 2019 -

https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf

⁵⁰ National minimum wage as of 2022: <https://www.mra.mu/index.php/eservices1/individual/special-allowance-employees#:~:text=The%20National%20minimum%20wage%20payable,an%20Export%20Enterprise%20%E2%80%93%20Rs%209%2C875;>

https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf;

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁵¹ <https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁵² Segall, David and Labowitz, Sarah. “Making Workers pay: Recruitment of the migrant labor force in the Gulf construction industry” *Center for Business and Human Rights, NYU Stern Business School* April 2017.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/547df270e4b0ba184dfc490e/t/58ec1e9ed1758e3915cb4c5b/1491869348464/FINALFINAL-MakingWorkersPay-Report-Digital.pdf>

⁵³ The total number of respondents here does not add up to 18 because one respondent was still in Mauritius.

⁵⁴ Segall, David and Labowitz, Sarah. “Making Workers pay: Recruitment of the migrant labor force in the Gulf construction industry” *Center for Business and Human Rights, NYU Stern Business School* April 2017.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/547df270e4b0ba184dfc490e/t/58ec1e9ed1758e3915cb4c5b/1491869348464/FINALFINAL-MakingWorkersPay-Report-Digital.pdf>

⁵⁵ The only exception was one of the two workers who got their job through a Mauritian labor broker.

⁵⁶ In USD, with currency conversion controlled roughly for each estimated year the fees were paid, total recruitment costs ranged from approximately USD \$445 to USD 2,839, with an average cost of USD 1,757.

⁵⁷ Segall, David and Labowitz, Sarah. “Making Workers pay: Recruitment of the migrant labor force in the Gulf construction industry” *Center for Business and Human Rights, NYU Stern Business School* April 2017.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/547df270e4b0ba184dfc490e/t/58ec1e9ed1758e3915cb4c5b/1491869348464/FINALFINAL-MakingWorkersPay-Report-Digital.pdf>

⁵⁸ In USD, with currency conversion controlled roughly for each estimated year the fee was paid, booking fees ranged from approximately USD 127 to USD 643, with an average of USD 374.

⁵⁹ Verité, 2019, “Financial and contractual approaches to mitigating foreign migrant worker recruitment-related risks” <https://s38965.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Verite-Financial-and-Contractual-Approaches-to-Mitigating-Foreign-Migrant-Worker-Recruitment-Related-Risks.pdf>

⁶⁰ USD conversion calculated using the exchange rate from the respondent’s year of departure from Bangladesh.

⁶¹ This number is derived from the total amount of debt reported by each respondent divided by each respondent’s reported average monthly salary.

⁶² One respondent indicated she used her earnings from a prior trip to Mauritius, for which she did take out loans to cover recruitment costs, to finance her travel on her most recent trip. One respondent who went to Mauritius through a Mauritian, Mauritius-based recruiter indicated that he did not take out any loans in Bangladesh to finance his recruitment. However, he also indicated that he was charged BDT 100k by the Mauritius-based broker, and that he only paid half the total sum immediately upon arrival (BDT 50k). The broker indicated that the respondent could repay the remaining amount from his salary within two months of employment. In other words, while there may not have been formal loan terms, this deferred payment was essentially a form of debt. While the respondent indicated that this arrangement worked well for him, it is important to note that debt owed directly to a labor intermediary increases the worker’s vulnerability to manipulation of debt and bonded labor (compared to workers whose debt is owed to an individual or institution completely separate from the labor intermediary).

⁶³ Calculated using exchange rates in year of respondents’ departure from Bangladesh.

⁶⁴ Calculated using exchange rates in year of respondents’ departure from Bangladesh.

⁶⁵ Calculated using exchange rates in year of respondents’ departure from Bangladesh.

⁶⁶ Calculated using each respondent’s total debt burden compared to each respondent’s reported average salary.

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- ⁶⁷ “Appendix: Revised draft guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labor” *International Conference of Labour Statisticians, International Labour Office, ILO*. October, 2018. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_647379.pdf
- ⁶⁸ <https://health.govmu.org/Pages/Departments-Hospitals/Departments/Occupational-Health-Unit.aspx>
- ⁶⁹ “Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world.” International Labour Organization, 2014. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf
- ⁷⁰ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648619.pdf
- ⁷¹ Some of these longer hours may include overtime work - respondents didn’t always differentiate between general hours and overtime hours, in part because many reported that overtime was mandatory and therefore was part of their regular schedule.
- ⁷² Employment Rights Act 2019 - https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
Stipulation about overtime pay for overtime hours is also described in the “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, <https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷³ Employment Rights Act 2019 - https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
Stipulation about overtime pay for overtime hours is also described in the “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, <https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷⁴ Employment Rights Act 2019 - https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
Stipulation about overtime pay for overtime hours is also described in the “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, <https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷⁵ Employment Rights Act 2019 - https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
Stipulation about overtime pay for overtime hours is also described in the “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, <https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷⁶ <https://www.mra.mu/index.php/eservices1/individual/special-allowance-employees#:~:text=The%20National%20minimum%20wage%20payable,an%20Export%20Enterprise%20%E2%80%93%20Rs%209%2C875>
- ⁷⁷ National minimum wage as of 2022: <https://www.mra.mu/index.php/eservices1/individual/special-allowance-employees#:~:text=The%20National%20minimum%20wage%20payable,an%20Export%20Enterprise%20%E2%80%93%20Rs%209%2C875>
https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷⁸ National minimum wage as of 2022: <https://www.mra.mu/index.php/eservices1/individual/special-allowance-employees#:~:text=The%20National%20minimum%20wage%20payable,an%20Export%20Enterprise%20%E2%80%93%20Rs%209%2C875>
https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/20_THE%20WORKERS%27%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019%20.pdf
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>
- ⁷⁹ NPS is the Mauritian government’s social security program. <https://socialsecurity.govmu.org/Pages/Department/National-Pensions-Scheme.aspx>

⁸⁰ <https://home.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/mu/pdf/2022/mu-Tax-Alert-Issue-62-Update-on-Portable-Retirement-Gratuity-Fund.pdf>

⁸¹ According to the Government of Mauritius' Social Security website, "non-Citizens who are working in the export manufacturing enterprise and who have a valid work permit are covered under the NPS as from the third year of residence in Mauritius" (<https://socialsecurity.govmu.org/Pages/Department/National-Pensions-Scheme.aspx>). Non-Mauritian citizens or migrant workers are not covered by the PRGF (<https://www.mra.mu/download/PRGFGuide.pdf>). It is possible that respondents who referenced the PRGF were actually contributing to the NPS but were confused about the name of the program.

⁸² "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 7,
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁸³

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/Consolidated%20Version%20of%20the%20Workers%27%20Rights%20Act%202019%20as%20at%207%20September%202020.pdf>
Section 27

⁸⁴

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/Consolidated%20Version%20of%20the%20Workers%27%20Rights%20Act%202019%20as%20at%207%20September%202020.pdf>
Section 27

⁸⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648619.pdf

⁸⁶ <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/GEFMS/GEFMS%20RA%20OLR%20-%20NORC%20Final%20Report.pdf>

⁸⁷ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 8,

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁸⁸ Some of the details of these stories have been either omitted or altered slightly to protect the identities of the respondents. The substantive nature of the events described by the respondents has not changed.

⁸⁹ Used average BDT-USD exchange rate in 2020, when respondent was last in Mauritius.

⁹⁰ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 8,

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹¹ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 8,

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹² "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 10

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹³ Unless otherwise indicated, each of these issues was reported only by one worker.

⁹⁴ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 10

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹⁵

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/Legislations/THE%20WORKERS%20RIGHTS%20Act%202019/Consolidated%20Version%20of%20the%20Workers%20Rights%20Act%202019%20as%20at%207%20September%202020.pdf>

⁹⁶ "Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world." International Labour Organization, 2014.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_242615.pdf

⁹⁷ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 7

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹⁸ "Know Your Rights" pamphlet, page 13

<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

⁹⁹ The ILO does not define "degrading" living conditions. In past work, Verité has used criteria like overcrowding, lack of safe space to store personal belongings, and inadequate sanitary facilities to define what constitutes a "degrading" living environment. (See: <https://www.verite.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/VeriteForcedLaborMalaysianElectronics2014.pdf>)

¹⁰⁰ “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, page 11,
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

¹⁰¹ “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, page 18,
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

¹⁰² “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, page 4,
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

¹⁰³ Since Bangladeshi garment workers’ immigration status in Mauritius is tied to the employer, they are not allowed to seek employment elsewhere, and legally must leave Mauritius if they decide to end their employment with their contracted employer.

¹⁰⁴ An additional four said the employer held their documents for them initially but eventually allowed them to hold their own documents.

¹⁰⁵ “Know Your Rights” pamphlet, page 10
<https://labour.govmu.org/Documents/A%20GUIDE%20FOR%20MIGRANT%20WORKERS%202019.PDF>

¹⁰⁶ Three indicators of involuntary work were not identified in the interviews: work for longer period of time than agreed, work for other employers than agreed, and unfree recruitment at birth or through transaction such as slavery or bonded labor.

¹⁰⁷ All names used are pseudonyms.