

Event Summary

DIGNIFIED WORK IN BANGLADESH: “WE CARE FOR YOUR SHIRTS... AND OUR RIGHTS”

Documentary and panel discussion

26 February 2018, European Parliament, Brussels



On 26 February 2018, CARE EU office with the support of CARE Austria and CARE Bangladesh organised an event in the European Parliament on dignified work in Bangladesh hosted by MEP Monika Vana, MEP Judith Sargentini and MEP Jean Lambert.

Dr. Andrea Barschdorf-Hager, Chief Executive Director of CARE Austria, introduced the documentary and presented CARE’s views and recommendations on EU policy related to dignified work and the garment sector.

“Multi-stakeholder initiatives and new legislation by the EU and EU member states on labour rights in garment value chains must focus on promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment as integral parts of improving labour standards.”

“Women workers are harassed at workplace in different ways: physically, mentally, verbally and sexually. Violence and harassment in the world of work is a human rights violation, is unacceptable and is incompatible with decent work. We urge the EU, including all Member States, to support the new ILO Convention on ‘Ending violence and harassment against women and men in the world of work’”. (See [CARE policy brief](#))

Humaira Aziz, Women’s Economic Empowerment Director at CARE Bangladesh, presented the situation especially for female garment workers in Bangladesh and the [OIKKO](#) project which is part of the film “We care for your shirts... and our Rights” (by CARE Austria 2017) which was screened during the event. **“Most women workers enter the sector with very low skills and limited employment options. But most importantly, they have been socialized into accepting less control over their choices and being less assertive due to prevailing social**

norms. Therefore, when we expect these women workers to be politically empowered to claim their rights, we must recognize challenges of social norms thrown upon them in their personal and professional lives. OIKKO was designed to explore how we can support pathways so that women workers can become politically empowered and voice their demands.”

Chloé Allio and Ebba Aurell, policy officers at the European Commission’s DG for International Cooperation and Development, highlighted key elements and latest progress in the Staff Working Document of the European Commission on how to make garment value chains more sustainable. They also presented current projects and relevant EU legislations regarding women’s economic empowerment and the garment sector.

The presentations were followed by a discussion between the audience and the panellists moderated by MEP Judith Sargentini who worked as a Shadow Rapporteur on the European Parliament position on the EU Flagship initiative concerning the garment sector.

Zia Choudhury, Country Director at CARE Bangladesh, highlighted the positive outcomes he witnessed during the OIKKO Project.

Humaira Aziz intervened: **“The problems in the garment industry in Bangladesh cannot be addressed by interventions in Bangladesh alone, the change needs to be seen throughout the global value chain. Therefore, the EU should introduce new legislation that makes it mandatory for companies that import garments into the EU to do human rights due diligence in their supply chains and publicly report it.”**

MEP Jean Lambert closed the event by remarking: **“There is still work needed to be done in the European Parliament in getting an understanding what “decent work” actually means. We also have to improve the work culture in our own countries and look at how to empower workers. Trade unions are important players and we have to look at employers and working hours. It’s a changing world and we do have a lot of work to do as workers have been exploited and unbranded stuff is on the markets. We can build on good work (EU, NGOs) and try to find ways for scaling this up. We have to engage governments, too.**

