

**GARMENT WORKERS, COVID-19
PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWN: A
REPORT FROM SOUTH KARNATAKA**

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Introduction

The state of Karnataka went into complete lockdown on March 23, 2020 along with the rest of the country. The unpreparedness of the government in dealing with the devastating consequences of the lockdown has by now been well-documented by many studies, news reports, and social media accounts.¹ Over the last two months of lockdown, working classes have been absolutely impoverished, with lakhs of workers struggling for food and money. Stripped of their dignity, they have been reduced to standing in long, unending queues for food, for ration, and in the case of migrant workers, walking hundreds of kilometres to be able to reach home in other states. All of this has taken place—and continues to take place—as state and district administrations struggle to cope with the scale of the unfolding distress.

As measures to ease the restrictions began to be discussed, state governments in north India such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat have decided to undertake measures that exempt factory owners from several of the labour laws that used to govern the relationship between an employer and worker. This includes raising the number of working hours to as much as 12 hours per day, not providing for overtime pay, and the elimination of legal options to challenge employers' diktats.²

Following these BJP-ruled states, Karnataka government on May 22 announced that it would exempt factories from Sections 51 and 54 of the Factories Act, which regulated the maximum weekly and daily working hours, respectively. It revised the maximum working hours from 8 hours to 10 hours in a day and from 48 to 60 hours in a week. News reports from earlier in the month had stated that other labour

¹ Vikas Rawal, Manish Kumar and Jesim Pais, 'Impact of Covid-19 Policies in India', <https://coronapolicyimpact.org/2020/04/07/indias-villages-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>; Chetan Choithani, The Wire, April 1, 2020, <https://thewire.in/women/lockdown-migrant-workers-wives>; Jean Dreze, The Indian Express, April 9, 2020, https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/coronavirus-lockdown-food-for-poor-migrants-mass-exodus-jean-dreze-6353790/lite/?twitter_impression=true; Farzana Afridi, Amrita Dhillon, Sanchari Roy, Ideas for India, <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/how-has-covid-19-crisis-affected-the-urban-poor-findings-from-a-phone-survey.html>

² Arvind Narrain, Maitreyi Krishnan and Clifton D Rozario, "COVID-19 Lockdown: Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh watering down labour laws is a body blow to the working class", May 12, 2020, Firstpost, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/covid-19-lockdown-uttar-pradesh-and-madhya-pradesh-watering-down-labour-laws-is-a-body-blow-to-the-working-class-8355791.html>.

“reforms” that the government was considering included relaxing laws regulating minimum wages, halting inspection of factories for the next six months or so among others. Factory owners in a meeting with the government reportedly also asked that they be exempted from paying salaries due to workers and not be made liable if workers complain against retrenchment and working conditions.³

Given these possible measures that will have far-reaching impact on workers in the state, Garments Mahila Karmikara Munnade and Alternative Law Forum came together to conduct a study of one segment of workers—garment workers—who form a numerically significant part of the working class in Bangalore city and are increasingly to be found in the nearby districts of Ramanagara, Mysore and Mandya. Through this study, we wanted to not only ask the workers what they thought of these measures but also understand the difficulties faced by them during the lockdown, how it frames their worldview at the present and how it may inform what individual, and possibly collective, action they might undertake to face the post-lockdown scenario.

Overview of garment industry in the Covid-era


The state in India values the garment industry for the foreign exchange that the industry brings in and for its ability to provide employment to a large segment of the population.⁴ It is on the basis of its importance to the Indian economy that the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) has reportedly asked that the Government of India provide a relief package to the textile and apparel sector. The package reportedly includes reduction in bank interest rate, extension of soft loans, moratorium for the repayment of principal and interest amounts to the banks for four quarters (1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021) and an exemption from anti-

³ See, for instance: Arpita Raj, “Labour Laws: Karnataka to Relook at Minimum Wage, Working Hours”, May 9, 2020, The Quint, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/labour-laws-karnataka-to-relook-at-minimum-wage-working-hours>; Sharan Poovanna, “Karnataka to review minimum wages, working hours, labour law compliance”, May 9, 2020, LiveMint, May 9, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/karnataka-to-review-minimum-wages-working-hours-labour-law-compliance-11589015389662.html>; Bala Chauhan, The New Indian Express, May 9, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2020/may/12/after-land-now-karnataka-mulls-labour-reforms-2142130.html>

⁴ According to one report, the garment industry earned around 40 billion US dollars for the country and employed around 105 million. See <https://www.fairwear.org/covid-19-dossier/covid-19-guidance-for-production-countries/covid-19-impact-and-responses-india/>

dumping duty and basic customs duty of all raw materials, dyes and chemicals, intermediaries, spares, accessories, etc.⁵ The Clothing Manufactures Association of India (CMAI) has reportedly stated that cancellation orders from buyers have started coming in, impacting adversely the ability of the industry to revive itself.⁶ Arguing for a relief package, the CMAI (which has around 3,700 members employing over 7 lakh people), has said most of its members do not have reserves to tide over this crisis which may span between three and six months.⁷

The crisis is evident, the losses real, and its effects possibly far-reaching. However, these losses faced by factory owners and employers seems to be the only concern for Indian states as they repeal all measures that protect labour's interests. Such skewed priorities that privilege employers over labourers, profits over lives, misses a vital fact that one of our respondents poignantly summarised:



“IT IS A FACT THAT THE ENTIRE WORLD HAS FACED LOSSES. IT IS A FACT THAT FACTORY OWNERS HAVE FACED LOSSES. BUT WE HAVE ALSO FACED LOSSES. WHO WILL LISTEN TO OUR LOSSES?”

Poorna, Button operator

This report is an account of these “losses”, one that the state needs to prioritise—but is refusing to do—as it prepares for a post-Covid economy.

Context for the report

Several news reports have begun to appear about how the pandemic has affected garment workers in several South Asia and South-East Asian countries. In

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Shramana Ganguly, “Apparel shopping goes phut in COVID-19 crisis”, *The Economic Times*, April 14, 2020, <https://m.economictimes.com/industry/cons-products/garments/-/textiles/apparel-shopping-goes-phut-in-covid-19-crisis/articleshow/75136706.cms>

⁷ “Covid -19 impact: 1 crore job cuts likely in textile industry without govt support, says CMAI”; April 14, 2020; https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/garments/-/textiles/lockdown-1-crore-job-cuts-likely-in-textile-industry-without-govt-support-says-cmai/articleshow/75125445.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

Cambodia and Malaysia, reports of heavy retrenchment have begun to appear;⁸ home-based workers in Pakistan have been severely hit with absolutely no work orders coming in;⁹ Bangladesh workers have reported that a majority of them have not received any payment for the month of April and although hundreds have begun to return to work, factories have not adopted safety measures to protect workers.¹⁰

In Karnataka, garment factory owners claim that they do not have the money to pay salaries to their workers and have asked for a stimulus package from the government, provide orders for domestic production or help pay employee salaries. This has left hundreds of garment workers in dire financial straits, an issue that will be presented in this report. With the state allowing garment factories to reopen even in red zones such as Bangalore, it becomes imperative to understand the difficulties faced by the garment workers in this post-lockdown scenario.

Our focus on garment workers is necessitated by some key facts: Over five lakh workers are employed by the industry in Karnataka; a majority of them are women and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on women has been understudied; the effect of the proposed labour “reforms” will particularly affect women workers in the garment industry who will not be able to work longer hours or for reduced pay. Many of the grievances, anxieties that workers shared with us are not specific to the garment industry alone; the Covid-19 pandemic has united—although through enormous distress—the working classes across the state and the country. This report, it is hoped, will illustrate the extent of workers’ distress, the factors affecting workers’ individual responses, and the possible impact it may have on collective action.

About the report

The report is based on telephonic survey conducted between May 16 and 18, 2020 of 82 workers in Bangalore, Ramanagara, Mandya and Mysore districts (see

⁸ <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2020/live-blog-on-how-the-coronavirus-influences-workers-in-supply-chains>

⁹ https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID-19-Management-Guidance_BWB_v2-2.pdf

¹⁰ <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2020/live-blog-on-how-the-coronavirus-influences-workers-in-supply-chains>

Appendix 1 for profile of respondents). Most garment factories are located in Bangalore district, although there has been a steady migration of factories to adjoining districts and rural areas since around the year 2010. Union organisers point out that this migration of factories has been due to rise in land prices in the city and that mandatory wages are lowest in rural parts of the state and highest in Bangalore. Our respondents are workers in Bangalore as well as nearby districts, since much of the migration of factories is restricted to districts of South Karnataka. All names have been changed to protect privacy.

In the report, we provide a sense of working conditions prior to the lockdown as well as workers' perspectives about it; the impact of the lockdown on the material and emotional lives of garment workers; and the extent of vulnerability they feel currently. We framed our survey questions around their experience of accessing food and ration, their current concerns regarding their everyday lives, and their opinions on state and employer assistance as well as the proposed labour "reforms". We also asked them what their anxieties and fears were in this period of the Covid-19 pandemic and how they felt about the present and future (See Appendix 2 for our questionnaire).

Employer-State vs Garment Workers: Findings and Analyses from the Survey

Even as this report was being written, the Karnataka Government announced that factories registered under the Factories Act could increase their working hours, daily and weekly. When this survey was being conducted, this was still a possibility and not a certainty; workers' articulations on the matter of longer hours and reduced pay are now centrally important. Our analysis has now been aligned to reflect upon this new reality and will place workers' testimonies on record.

Abdication of lawful responsibility by employers during the pandemic

The Karnataka state government clearly believes that losses faced by factory owners need to be recuperated through a thorough depletion of the worker's labouring body, as evidenced by its order on May 22, 2020 which raised the maximum working hours in a day and a week to 10 and 60 respectively. This "generosity" towards factory owners is in stark contrast to the illegal and extractive behaviour of the latter in the matter of salary payments to workers, even during the crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Only 61 percent of garment workers received full monthly wages for the month of March; 18 percent received 75 to 80 percent of their wages,¹¹ 9 percent received only between 30 and 50 percent of their wages.

The situation with regard to **salaries for April** was much worse with **a whopping 63 percent having received no salary at all. 17 percent of workers reported that they received 50 percent and less** of their salaries for April while an equal

SEEMA, BUTTON OPERATOR

If they increase the working hours, our children will not remember their mothers anymore. Our bodies will give up under the burden of this labour.

Also if we work from 6 am to 6 pm, who will do our house work? Can we afford to hire domestic help?

¹¹ In these cases, factory owners paid only for the 20-23 days that workers worked in March before the nation-wide lockdown was announced.

SHIVA, WORKS IN FINISHING

We will not work. We already work nine hours and are exhausted at the end of the day. Then we spend two hours travelling back and forth; if in a day we give up about 14 hours of our day to these factories, what will be left for us?

percentage reported receiving full salaries for the month. **Many workers reported that full or partial salaries have been given only to those who reported to work in May.** These workers are undertaking expensive or unsafe travel to be able to reach their workplace, a point we will get to later.

It is important to put these numbers in perspective lest it be said that factory owners are plagued by losses themselves. **What really does 75 to 80 percent of wages translate to in real numbers? How much are factory owners paying when they pay garment 50 percent or even full wages?**

When factory owners give workers 50 to 70 percent of their pay, what they are paying most workers is anywhere between Rs. 3500 and Rs. 5000. This calculation has been arrived at based on what respondents told us about what their monthly salary was. **83 percent of our respondents said they earned less than Rs.10000 or less per month.** Of these set of workers, 19 percent reported earning less than Rs.8000 per month.

These worker salaries have to meet expenses that

- go into feeding families of atleast four to five members (62 percent of respondents reported this family size);
- pay rent (86 percent reported living in rented accommodations) and utility bills;
- transport back and forth from work (several workers reported being charged anywhere between Rs. 250 and Rs. 1000 by companies or private vehicles);
- for children's education, medical emergencies that may arise, repayment of loans, if any.

Difficulties for garment workers due to non-payment of salaries has been exacerbated by the fact that other earning members of the family had lost their

jobs and income during this period of the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, income security was a distant dream, with **51 percent of four-member households in our study reporting a total monthly income of less than Rs. 15000.**

In a recent letter to Chief Minister BS Yeddiyurappa, factory owners referred to themselves as ‘annadatas’ and ‘udyogadatas’.¹² The hollowness of such self-descriptions is laid bare when **96 percent of respondents said that they received absolutely no assistance from their employers, be it in the form of cooked food, dry ration kits, loans and advances.** It is to these owners that the state has handed over 12 hours in a week that belonged to the worker. To be sure, these additional hours were put in by workers earlier as overtime. **50 percent of our respondents reported doing overtime duty, for which they got paid either by hour or piece, usually at rates higher than during normal workdays.** The Karnataka Government’s notification betrays a lack of understanding and empathy regarding workers’ health and lives, particularly of women workers.

Abdication of workers by the state during the pandemic

By increasing working hours, the state has ignored working conditions in garment factories where ‘production torture’ has been well-documented—i.e. the need to meet deadlines for orders often means that workers are forced to work under high pressure and in excess of their working hours, so much so that workers are not allowed to even take periodic breaks.¹³ This takes place under verbally, physically and sexually abusive environments where the fact of many women

SEEMA, BUTTON OPERATOR

If we take into account our expenses for electricity, food and milk, van for transport, interest on loans etc, we are barely able to meet the expenses with our salary. If they reduce even this, what is even the point of working?

¹² Theja Ram, “Capt Manivannan IAS shunted out – Industry pressure or allegations?”, May 12, 2020, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/capt-manivannan-ias-shunted-out-industry-pressure-or-allegations-124398>

¹³ PUCL Karnataka, NLSIU Bangalore, Vimochana, Alternative Law Forum, Concern-IISc, Manthan Law, Garments Mahila Karmikara Munnade, “Production Torture: A Study of Working Conditions, including workplace harassment, faced by women garment workers in Bangalore and other districts”, April 2019, <http://puclkarnataka.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Production-Torture-Final-May-25-1.pdf>.

workers supervised by few men brings into play the operation of patriarchal power.

Extension of working hours places at severe risk the livelihood of women workers as it makes it impossible for them to work for longer hours. Questions of safety, social taboos on women returning late, the need to maintain and provide for the household already restrict women's mobility and opportunities for employment. With the workday further extended, it is quite likely that women may have to leave the workforce or put their safety, health and strength at stake to be able to earn meagre salaries.

Given that the state has dragged its feet on issues faced by workers during the lockdown, this move to extend working hours without speaking to workers' unions is further evidence of the abdication of the state's responsibility towards workers. Most workers told us that they received little to no assistance from the government. **60 percent said they believed that the state had done absolutely nothing for workers. 75 percent of our respondents said they received no free food from the government, 51 percent said they received no free ration from the government, 66 percent said they received no subsidised ration from public distribution system (PDS), and 18 percent said they received absolutely no assistance from the government.** To a question on what the government had done for workers during lockdown.

Despite several calls from activists, trade union organisers and relief workers, the government offered no income support to working-class households. **45 percent of our respondents said that they had to borrow money to tide over the**

CHANDRA, TAILOR

'I am scared about going back to work because now I hear that we may have to stitch masks. We used to earlier stitch shirts but now this is a new thing and if we make mistakes, we will get very badly reprimanded. In garment factories, they employ choicest of abuses, refer to us in derogatory fashion. Those who work in garment factories do so because they have no option. Many times, I have felt that maybe it is better to do construction work rather than garment work.'

RADHA, TAILOR

We had to pay rent, we did not have a choice. Our landlord came in front of our house, early in the morning and asked us to pay up. When we said that the government had postponed payment of rent, they told us to get the government to our doorstep and tell them to waive off our loans and we will let go of your rent. In these circumstances, how could we not pay rent? We had to. The government will tell one thing, but we can't do what they say.

lockdown, mostly from neighbours, friends and relatives. **While 68 percent reported not having paid rent, 32 percent paid their rent by borrowing money, dipping into savings or using their salary.**

Although the government had asked landlords not to demand rent from tenants during the period of the lockdown, the lack of enforcement of this directive has meant that tenants have been left in the lurch. Most workers also expressed great tension and anxiety about having to pay rent, utility bills and interest repayments, all of which had accumulated over the last two months. Given that little to no savings is possible in low-income households such as a garment worker's, paying from fund reserves is not possible. **60 percent of workers reported that they had no savings at all while many of the workers who did report that they had savings emphasised that they were very small in size.**

The complete apathy of the state towards workers is seen in the fact that while it allowed factories to reopen, the state provided no transport facilities for workers to reach their workplace. **During our survey, workers reported with great anguish their inability to go to work despite factories having restarted. 79 percent of workers reported that their factories had reopened and 72 percent said they had been called back for work.** But many reported being unable to travel to work or great difficulties they were undertaking to reach their workplace. **Workers are walking to work, hitching rides from passers-by, getting together to hire vans for expensive rates paid for by themselves. Women in districts outside Bangalore reported undertaking arduous and unsafe journeys to be able to reach work.** One worker told us that she is spending nearly 30 percent of her salary on autorickshaws since there are no bus facilities. She had to go to work because both her husband and son-in-law were not employed. **Those who could not commute**

reported feeling extremely anxious and worried about the security of their jobs, especially since some of their colleagues had begun to work. Some workers stated feeling particularly restless about being unable to work because their colleagues who had returned to work had received full or partial payments. With no money at all in their hands, workers' responses indicated great desperation. Below are select excerpts from our conversations with workers on being unable to travel to work.

Mani is a 33-year old garment worker who travelled everyday for 45 kms to reach Mysore to work in a major export factory. She earned Rs.8000 per month as a tailor, of which she spent Rs. 2000 to purchase a pass for her daily travels. Her daily routine included leaving home 6 am and travelling for 2 hours to reach the factory. By the time she returned from work, it was usually 8.30 in the night.

Not only is her family already afraid for her safety, Mani is worried about what others in her village would say if she regularly returned late from work. Understandably, she is opposed to the extension of working hours because she will simply not be able to work longer hours and will have to quit. 'Gents can come whenever and go. But what will ladies do?', she asks

Now that she is unable to go to work because of the lack of transport facilities, she says, "They should have made same rules for everyone; now some people can go to factory to work; some of us cannot because we have no means of work; earlier I was fine thinking no one is going to work but now that our factory has started 15 days ago, I am afraid I will lose job".

Raji is a 38-year-old garment worker who travelled to the factory in Srirangapatna from her village in Mandya district everyday in a van for which she paid Rs. 1000 a month. Many from her village work at garment factories. Since the time she restarted work after the lockdown, she leaves home at 6 am so that she can reach factory by 9 pm. The reason she leaves three hours earlier is because she hails down vehicles and takes lift from these passers-by. Asked whether she did not consider this unsafe, she responded that she was afraid of losing her job. Given that her sons have no work right now, the family is dependent on her salary.

"If all factories were closed, or if everyone had access to transport facilities, it would be better. Most people are taking these unsafe options for fear that they may lose their jobs, especially since some of their colleagues are going. If we don't go, people around us will start talking, they'll ask us if we got fired, talk badly about us, whether we can't even hold onto our jobs.

Pavitra is a 25 year old woman who travelled from her village to Srirangapatna everyday for working in a major export-based company. She works in their ironing department and earns rs.8000 per month. It takes her 1.5 hours to travel one way to work and by the time she reaches home it is around 7 pm. “If it is increased to 8 pm or so i will reach home only by 10 pm. what will people around us say?”

Pavitra is managing to travel to work everyday on bike with someone she knows. She is paying for petrol right now. On the day we spoke to her, she wasn't able to go to work because that person refused. She was going to lose the day's salary.

What Workers Want

When we began our survey, extension of working hours and reduced pay were still only possibilities as were elimination of employer contribution to workers' PF (provident fund) and reduction of ESI (Employee State Insurance) facilities. We asked them whether they would continue to work if any of these provisions were altered. **66 percent of the workers said that they would not work for reduced pay; 65 percent said they would not work longer hours; 75 percent said that they would not work if ESI**

CHANDRA, TAILOR

At night I can't sleep thinking about what will happen next. I don't know what to do about the future, how to manage expenses, with kids. I am tired of life. We have no money absolutely. We are so desperate that if they give us even Rs. 3000 we will have to work

RAJI, HELPER

All of us will leave work if they extend hours and reduce pay. As helper, I stand continuously for 8 hours. My feet have worn out in this way.

facilities were withdrawn and 82 percent said they would quit if the provision for PF was stopped.

It is important to mention here that the last two months of lockdown with no food or income support has left workers feeling extremely vulnerable with their impoverishment bearing down heavily on them. Those who agreed to working without these facilities pointed out how other members of the family did not have work, the pressure to pay rent, utility bills and interest on loans were extremely high and the possibility of not finding employment was something they could not afford. These anxieties

are further fuelled by information circulating among garment workers that orders were reducing, factories may close unable to bear the losses, that factories can be closed without notice and workers will not be able to demand their dues. Other information circulating at the time of the survey included the possibility that they may have to work longer hours with/or reduced salaries; that workers may have to work on Sundays. One worker reported that she had been hearing rumours that they may to work for piece rate and may not get fixed pay. Such circulation of information and rumours was the reason that nearly 30 percent listed getting back to work as their primary concern, and not fear of infection, or reduced pay or long working hours.

SARASWATHI, TAILOR

It's terrible if they reduce pay even during trying times such as these. We are putting our lives at risk and working. We will get together and ask.

SHIVA, WORKS IN FINISHING

Right now, all workers are from Ramanagara which is in green zone. But workers from Mandya , where the infection spread is high might start to come now that inter-district travel is allowed. They will come because factory has given April salary only to those who have come to factory now.

Workers are afraid of getting infected during travel or within the workplace, worried that they may carry home the virus to their family members, that lockdowns could become a regular feature rendering them completely penniless. But they know they cannot afford to not work; those who have migrated to cities such as Bangalore say that earning money was the only reason they left their village; some are so desperate that they have said they will work under any conditions and reason that many small garment factories anyway do not have options for PF and ESI

For factory owners who have always resisted the payment of even minimum wages to their workers, this desperation offers possibilities for further exploitation. During the course of our telephonic surveys, phone numbers of our volunteers got circulated among a few workers in Ramanagara who called us asking for help because factory owners were pressurising them to work on Sundays as well. One worker-organiser from the district told us that tailors in particular are being harassed to increase

production and stitch masks; workers were asked to submit to oppressive conditions because employers know they the former cannot afford to lose their jobs.

It is important to recognise here that decades of struggle with the state and campaigning with brands had ensured that garment workers received some benefits, primary among them being that of PF. During our survey, **99 percent of the workers said they had access to ESI, 96 percent said they had PF and 92 percent said they got some form of bonus once during the year.** Given that salaries themselves are a pittance and workers barely manage a hand-to-mouth existence, they were vociferous about protecting these benefits that help them tide over financial and medical crises. Below are some excerpts from our conversations with workers regarding their PF benefits.¹⁴

'We live a hand-to-mouth existence. So PF is like our savings. Our salary is spent in rent, food, children's education etc. It is through PF which we can withdraw as a lumpsum that we can use for many things like repaying loan, taking a house on lease etc. We live and work with complete reliance on PF as our safety net.

-- Ganga, Button operator

PF is the only one way in which we save given how little we earn. If they take that away from us, we will not have any savings left.

'The only reason we work in garment factories is because of PF. If that is not there, then it makes no sense for us to work such long hours at all for such small salaries.'

--Pavithra, Ironing department

Even as workers were vociferous about retaining their existing rights and not have them dwindle, there were immediate concerns that they needed addressed by the government. They are as follows:

¹⁴ On strike

1. Income support to help with payment of rent, utilities and other necessities.
2. Adequate and inexpensive transport facilities that allow workers to help travel between work and home.
3. Ensuring companies pay both March and April salaries in full without conditionalities.
4. Job security so that workers are not retrenched.
5. Preventing harassment of workers by landlords and loan agents, particularly from microfinance institutions which have been insisting on payment of interest even during the lockdown.
6. Ensuring access to food and ration for the next few months and not only in cities. Many rural-based workers reported having received no food or ration from the state.
7. Waiving off agricultural loans was a priority for women workers who were part of rural households.

Recommendations

This report has sought to provide insights into the material difficulties and vulnerabilities faced by garment workers during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Measures undertaken by the state need to instil workers with a sense of hope and support that their government is looking out for them and protecting their rights. To this end, we have the following recommendations to make:

1. Government should set up a **helpline** for garment workers on wage-related and working conditions-related issues. As this survey has shown, many workers are anxious and worried about how they will make ends meet, given that nearly 70 percent have not been paid salary for April. Complaints made to these helplines must be immediately addressed.
2. Government must ensure that **workers are paid wages**, as per the MHA order on wages which mandates that employers have to pay employees full wages until May 18, 2020.
3. Government must call for a **meeting with garment workers unions** to address concerns of wages, working hours, working conditions, commuting facilities, among others.
4. Government should evolve a **mechanism to address worker concerns if factories shut down in this period**. It should ensure payment of wages, arrears and any other form of compensation due to them.
5. Workers who have been laid off or will be laid off should be identified and provided **with access to social security safety nets such as medical insurance, universal access to public distribution system as well as income support**.
6. Garment factories must be strictly instructed to **provide overtime pay and not force workers to work on Sundays and holidays**.
7. **The exemption of factories** from sections of the Factory Act regarding working hours must be withdrawn.
8. BMTC, KSRTC must **provide transport services** to and from garment factories at subsidised rates. Where possible garment factories must provide **free** transport services to workers.

9. **Health camps** must be conducted for all garment workers and their families.
10. **Regular inspections of factories** must be undertaken to ensure safety practices, including physical distancing, are followed.
11. **Harassment from microfinance institutions and other lending institutions must be curtailed.** Workers already distressed by lack of income and job security must not be made to feel more threatened.
12. **Fees** of children of garment workers must be waived off.
13. Garment workers must be provided **vegetables, eggs and meat at subsidised rates** so that their nutritional status does not deteriorate.

Appendix 1: Profile of Respondents

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO LOCATION AND GENDER

Sl.No	Name of districts	Number of female workers	Number of male workers	Total
1	Bangalore	42	9	51
2	Ramanagara	13	1	14
3	Mysore	9	0	9
4	Mandya	8	0	8
Total		72	10	82

TABLE 2: AGE-WISE BREAKUP OF RESPONDENTS

Age group	Number of respondents
20-30	19
30-40	47
40-50	16

TABLE 3: NATIVE DISTRICTS OF RESPONDENTS

Name of districts	Within district	Outside district	Outside state
Bangalore	21	17	3
Ramanagara	10	3	1
Mysore	6	4	0
Mandya	5	3	0

TABLE 4: NATURE OF WORK OF RESPONDENTS

Nature of work	Percent of respondents
Tailor	62
Helper	12
Button operator	6

Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

Survey of Garment Workers	
Personal Information	
1	Name
2	Age
3	Gender
4	Marital status
5	District working in (before lockdown)
6	Native district
7	No. of family members
8	No. of earning family members (before lockdown)
9	Total income of family (before lockdown)
Work information (before lockdown)	
10	Name of factory
11	Location of factory
12	Working as
13	No. of years of work
14	Salary
15	No. of hours of work
16	How often did you do over time?
17	Did you receive overtime pay?
18	How much was overtime pay
19	What benefits did you receive from work (Yes/No)
a	ESI
b	PF
c	Free health check-up
d	Free food in canteen
e	Free transport
f	Bonus
g	Any other (please specify)
Experience of lockdown	
20	When was the last day of work?
21	How much salary did you receive for March
22	How much salary did you receive for April
23	During lockdown, how did you manage for food?
24	During lockdown, how did you manage for money?
25	During lockdown, how did you manage for rent?
26	What other expenses did you have and how did you manage it?
27	Did you have savings before the lockdown?
28	What kind of savings? (Chits, FD, RD etc)
29	Have you continued saving?

30	Did you borrow money to survive the lockdown (If no, please go to q.34)
31	Who did you borrow from?
a	Moneylender
b	Neighbour
c	Relative
d	Bank
e	Other (Please specify)
32	How much loan did you borrow? If multiple sources, please provide break-up.
33	How much is the interest rate for the loans you have borrowed?
34	Did you receive aid from government during lockdown?
a	Free food
b	Free ration
c	PDS
d	Anganwadis
e	Indira Canteen
f	Jan Dhan
g	None
h	Any other (please specify)
35	Did you receive assistance from employer?
a	Food
b	Medical help
c	Loans/Advances
d	None
d	Any other (please specify)
	Current work situation
36	Has work restarted in your factory (If no, please go to q.42)
37	Have you been called back for work? (If no, please go to q.42)
38	How many workers have been called back for work?
39	How are you travelling to work?
40	How many hours per day are you working?
41	Any reduction in salary?
42	Do you think you will be called back for work? (Yes/No/Maybe)
43	Are you a member of any union?
44	Do you think unions are necessary?
45	What have you heard about the situation in garment factories?
45	What are your concerns right now regarding work?
47	What are your concerns regarding you and your family?
48	If and when work resumes in factory, are you willing to work for
i	Reduced Pay
ii	Longer hours
iii	No ESI
iv	No PF

49	If they answer yes to any of the above options, please ask them why?
50	What are your views on how the govt has handled lockdown for workers
51	What are your expectations from the govt
52	How are you feeling at the moment about the future
53	Please add your thoughts and observations about how the interviewee sounded or responded to the questions. It can be anything that the questionnaire didnt capture or you didn't have space to note down.