

# Garment workers for Adidas, Nike and H&M among those going hungry due to coronavirus pandemic, survey finds

By [Max Walden](#)

5 December, 2020



The vast majority of the world's garment workers are women. (Reuters: Mohammad Ponir Hossain)

Share

Lower incomes and unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have forced garment workers across the world further into poverty and imperilled their access to food, a new study has found.

## Key points:

- Current and former employees of major retailers and brands said they struggled to buy enough food for themselves
- Eight in 10 respondents with children said they skipped meals or ate less to ensure their children had enough to eat

- A majority reported taking on debt or borrowing money to buy food for themselves or their family

A survey of almost 400 workers making clothes for big-name brands including Adidas, GAP, H&M, Nike and Gildan found that "declining incomes are leading to widespread hunger among workers and their families".

Some 77 per cent of garment workers surveyed across nine countries including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar reported that they or a member of their household have gone hungry since the beginning of the pandemic.

"The high levels of hunger reported by workers in our survey are alarming, especially since so many of these workers are still in employment," said the report's author Genevieve LeBaron, professor of politics at the University of Sheffield.

For those who had been fired by their employers, 70 per cent reported not receiving full legally mandated severance pay.

"Hunger and food insecurity appears already to be widespread and is growing across the supply chain," Professor LeBaron said.

YOUTUBE After losing their jobs, these Cambodian workers want what they're owed

## **COVID poverty hurting women the most**

Women accounted for 70 per cent of the respondents of the survey, which was conducted in partnership with international labour rights watchdog the Workers Rights Consortium.

This is reflective of global trends, given women account for a disproportionate percentage of the world's garment workers.

In Cambodia, for example, up to 85 per cent of those working in garment factories are women.

Of those surveyed by the researchers who had children, 80 per cent reported going without meals or otherwise reducing their food intake to make sure that their dependents had enough to eat.

Some 88 per cent of the overall cohort, meanwhile, said they had been forced to reduce the amount of food consumed in their households due to lower income.



Tens of thousands of factory workers in Cambodia have been put out of work since the start of the pandemic.*(Reuters: Samrang Pring)*

Three-quarters said that they had borrowed money or accrued debt to buy food since the beginning of the pandemic.

Penelope Kyritsis, director of strategic research at the Worker Rights Consortium, said: "Several apparel companies cited by workers responding to the survey are owned by billionaires: including Bestseller, C&A, and Zara."

"Mass market retailers, like Amazon and Target, are thriving during the pandemic.

"These companies, and the industry as a whole, are more than financially capable of ensuring that the workers who sew their clothes are able to feed their families."

One garment worker in Myanmar told the researchers that she planned to cook rice soup for all meals to afford rental payments.

The UN predicts that poverty will increase in Myanmar by 24 per cent as the result of the pandemic and has provided emergency cash grants for 80,000 garment workers.

But the Myanmar Garments Manufacturers Association reported as of September 2019 that there were at least 450,000 people employed in the South-East Asian country's garment industry.

YOUTUBE'Hidden' garment workers in Australia vulnerable to exploitation while sewing from home | ABC News

A coalition of labour NGOs in July called for brands in the global fashion industry to provide a "supply chain relief contribution" — a one-off payment accounting for lost income — to all garment workers during the COVID crisis.

But brands have not yet been forthcoming.

"We recommend that apparel companies, and the governments of the countries in which they are headquartered, immediately take stock of how companies' responses to the pandemic are impacting suppliers and workers," the Worker Rights Consortium report said.

"Both governments and companies should take immediate action to address the dynamics leading to hunger and reduced nutrition."