



LIFE AND BUILDING SAFETY INITIATIVE

**Promoting safer working conditions
for factory workers in apparel and
footwear industry.**



LABS
Life And Building Safety

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Promoting a safe and secure working environment is a key element of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In past years, the tragic events at factories in Bangladesh and Pakistan have highlighted the urgent need to address life and building safety in the apparel and footwear industry. Life and Building Safety (LABS) is building on these experiences and bringing together key factors to improve fire, electrical, and structural building safety across the supply chain.

A corporate responsibility to care

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights stipulate a corporate responsibility to ensure the rights of workers in terms of work safety conditions and respect the physical and mental integrity of the worker in the exercise of his or her employment.

Under the LABS initiative, brands and retailers join forces to pursue a scalable program to effectively mitigate preventable fire, electrical, and structural building safety risks in key apparel and footwear producing countries. The program's success requires close cooperation and local collaboration with stakeholders such as industry associations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and governments. The worker's voice in this process is essential; LABS will establish hotlines and recognize the importance of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) committees.

A harmonized life-safety program

LABS aims to improve worker safety in the apparel and footwear industry by effectively identifying and mitigating the risks related to fire, electrical, and structural building safety and evacuation. LABS is a single-country based coherent and consistent worker-safety program to assess factories and provide a framework for monitoring and ensuring mitigation and remediation.

LABS, in conjunction with applicable country laws, assures factories commit to adhering to a harmonized, country level standard regarding fire, electrical, and building safety. Brands and retailers will collaborate on monitoring and summoning while sharing monitoring and program costs.

While LABS focuses on the corporate responsibility to foster safety and respect for human rights, it in no way reduces the duty of governments and related enforcement agencies to ensure their citizens work in safe places. LABS will continuously engage with local governments to integrate best practices into policies.

A collaborative model for change

To build a global mechanism to mitigate worker and building safety risks, multi-brand and local key stakeholder consultation and collaboration is essential. LABS participants are a group of global brands and retailers, facilitated by IDH, The Sustainable Trade Initiative, who will seek engagement with local stakeholders like industry associations, CSOs, and governments and institutes to create better safety policies and provisions.

The development of LABS is divided into three phases. The scoping and development phase started with a pilot in Vietnam in 2018 and in India in 2019. The program is also entering its full implementation phase in 2019.

LABS will also explore expanding beyond the pilot countries to locations with the most need for fire, electrical, and structural improvements and where LABS members have the most suppliers – most likely Pakistan and Cambodia. The long-term objective of LABS is to establish a global reach.

Shared value for everybody

LABS is establishing a collaborative platform and implementation plan to deliver its objectives. The methodology is built on internationally accepted fire, electrical, and structural building safety standards to establish a harmonized, country-based framework with rapid scalability. Creating shared value for workers, factories, brands, and governments by increasing worker safety is the number one goal for all.

An investment in the industry's future

LABS is funded by committed brands and retailers, and will explore complementary funding sources following the early implementation phase. Participating factories will also contribute to the program via their participation fee. LABS participants are committed to LABS via participatory governance, funding, and time and subject-matter expertise. Participating brands and retailers will provide their supplier lists to LABS for the selected countries and commit to engage their suppliers in remediation where necessary.

Key elements of the methodology are:

- Collective, non-competitive engagement and accountability across the industry
- Local ownership via country round tables
- Unified safety standards and protocols for factories
- Assessments and remediation by vetted experts
- Factory coordinators to function as the intermediary between factories and LABS brands on monitoring, inspection and remediation
- Consistent corrective action plans (CAPs)
- An ITplatform for following up on mitigation identified in the CAPs
- Building capacity and developing expertise on worker and building safety issues available to factories
- Recognizing the importance of OHS committees and establishing hotlines to integrate the workers' voices in the process.



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Engaging with LABS

For more information and details on how to become a partner, please reach out: info@labsinitiative.com.

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Transparency

Transparency is a core principle of LABS. LABS will pursue transparency in its activities, progress, and publications wherever feasible.

LABS will publicly share

- LABS standards, against which factories are measured
- Inspection protocols
- Factory inspections and remediation data and CAPs, including versions in the local language
- Aggregated factory lists

Additionally, LABS will publicly share helpline data, next to LABS newsletters. If a factory remains non-compliant in the long-term, LABS will publicize this information. Brands will need to decide to continue or suspend their commercial relationship with that factory individually.

National and local ownership

Involving individuals from government entities and local civil society organizations is an important element in the creation of national and local ownership for the challenge at hand. Government entities are essential to review the current legal framework as well as the state of inspection and enforcement agencies. Local civil society organizations are essential to raise awareness and create in-country capacity to mitigate risks (e.g.: supporting universities to train engineers that can properly assess building safety). LABS will set up local round tables to embed the program at the country level.

Empowering workers

Workers have a meaningful voice and should be empowered to refuse unsafe work. LABS recognizes this and aims to enable an environment to speak out (e.g.: establishing hotlines). LABS and its participants require

factories to establish OHS committees, in compliance with local legislation. An OSH committee is based on the principle that everyone in the workplace have a responsibility for health and safety in their environment. These committees will empower groups of worker and employer representatives to identify and solve health and safety problems at the factory together. When all workers are aware of hazards and can contribute to improving safety and health, there will be fewer accidents and safer work places.

Country operations

LABS will consider the risks, urgency, and current availability of capacity building efforts by country to identify where the needs are the highest. In exploratory conversations during the Scoping phase, India, Vietnam, Pakistan, and Cambodia have consistently been mentioned as potential areas of focus.

LABS development is not focusing on Bangladesh. A broad group of organizations and brands have already established mechanisms to address worker safety in Bangladesh. LABS will build on these learnings to expand worker safety in other countries.

Factory improvement

The brands will use their available tools and leverage to facilitate the taking of corrective actions to the factories.

Monitoring

LABS will monitor remedial actions and ensure improvements are sustained through technical and public policy experts. These experts will verify activities on the ground are occurring and are up to standard. In addition, they will engage the local government on legislation and enforcement of safety risks.