

# PLATFORM FOR SAFETY IN APPAREL AND FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY

**WHITE PAPER**



# Event Summary

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The Life and Building Safety Initiative (LABS) recently launched the 'Platform for Safety in Apparel and Footwear Industry (PSAFI)', a collaborative platform designed to promote safety and sustainable development in the Apparel, Textile, Footwear and Accessories industry in India.

This report provides a background of LABS and PSAFI, captures the highlights of the April 28, 2023 roundtable, including speakers and discussion topics, survey feedback, actionable outcomes, and next steps.

# Introduction

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The apparel, textile, footwear and accessories industry in India is among the largest producers in the world with **4%** of global trade in textiles and apparel, which is **12%** of the total export from the country. The industry contributes to **2.3%** of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or **7%** of industry output in value terms. It is one of the largest employers in India with women workers accounting for approximately **70%** of its workforce.

# Background

## LABS

The Life and Building Safety (LABS) Initiative is an industry-driven program, in which multiple brands and retailers join forces with public organizations to operate a scalable program to mitigate preventable fire, electrical, and structural safety risks in key apparel, footwear and accessories-producing factories in a targeted fashion.

Many workers in key apparel-producing countries work in unsafe environments which can have lethal consequences. For that reason, it is the mission of the LABS Initiative to provide safer working conditions for factory workers in the apparel, footwear and accessories industries.

We organize our activities around identifying and solving risks related to fire and electrical hazards, structural building safety, and evacuation, so workers can be more aware of various dimension of safety and lead better lives. We accomplished this by developing country-specific solutions, through creating a life-safety program that delivers a harmonized framework for monitoring, assessing, reducing risk, and remediating.

Through our efforts, we identified the need for larger collaborations between manufacturing industries, especially in the worker-intensive apparel and footwear sectors.

Hence, PSAFI has been created to bring about collective discussions, definite outcomes, and purposeful follow-up.

## PSAFI

The Platform for Safety in Apparel and Footwear Industry (PSAFI) is a collaborative platform established by the Life and Building Safety (LABS) Initiative. PSAFI was designed to promote fire, electrical, and building safety in the Apparel, Textile, Footwear and Accessories industry in India. PSAFI provides a trusted, neutral space for industry stakeholders to convene, discuss, and exchange ideas and insights regarding safety issues in the sector. Furthermore, PSAFI aims to expedite actions regarding safety and facilitate coordination and alignment across initiatives, focusing on promoting a preventive safety culture by collaborating with governments, employers, workers, and associations.

# PSAFI

## Roundtable Conference

PSAFI was launched on April 28, 2023, in New Delhi, India. Among the participants were experts, stakeholders, and representatives from the industry, government, and workers' organizations. We discussed and deliberated ways and means to chart a path towards a safer and more sustainable future for the Apparel, Textile, Footwear and Accessories industries in India.

### Key Conference Objectives

- Identifying opportunities to scale interventions
- Improving the management of building-safety risks and transparency in reporting
- Promoting gender empowerment
- Encouraging positive changes towards safe working conditions in factories and industrial parks across the country and the manufacturing sector

PSAFI will convene twice a year to gain momentum towards achieving its goals.



### Opening Address

Mr. Sarobindo Malhotra, Global Program Lead, LABS Initiative, addressed the gathering and set the tone by emphasizing the role of each stakeholder in motivating the safety culture in the apparel, textile, footwear and accessories industries.

### Keynote Address



**Smt. Prajakta L. Verma**  
**Joint Secretary**  
**Ministry of Textiles**  
**Government of India**

**Smt. Prajakta L. Verma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, Government of India**, addressed the gathering and shared the focus of the ministry in driving worker safety.

**We are glad that LABS has initiated the Platform for Safety in Apparel and Footwear Industry. Textile industry is one of the largest employers in the country, and it is important to take care of our human resources. There are a lot of challenges around worker safety, and especially safety of women workers, which also presents an opportunity to make improvements. We look forward to PSAFI helping stakeholders in coming together in a collaborative manner and addressing issues together in a steadfast way, for providing safe and healthy environment to workers in the sector.”**



## Guest Speaker

**Ms.Chandrima Chatterjee, Secretary General of Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) said**

Industry is driven by workers and thus their safety is of highest importance, and it is an uphill task. This can be achieved by collaborative engagements. **The capacity building and engagement which empowers workers to report safe working conditions can be driven by training them on safety culture.**”



# Discussion Topics

## **Worker Safety:** How do various stakeholders in the supply chain view safety?

### **Discussion Points**

- Understanding cost impact vs. business value while considering building modifications to meet safety requirements would require substantial capital. Thus, businesses need to consider this as an investment and not an expense
- Building worker confidence by training them to understand safety risks and their role in how to respond and react
- Sourcing organization to collectively work towards adapting optimum safety requirement as prerequisite for sourcing
- Drive transparency in safety conditions of factories and incentivize the factories who are driving the safety culture.

### **Discussion Outcomes**

- Leadership commitment to recognize safety as a minimum requirement to do business and to be shared at various levels including brands, factories, associations, and government
- Collaboration at government, association, brand and factory level to ensure the effective implementation of safety culture
- Knowledge transfer to make safety culture accessible to all (irrespective of their business size) to achieve a greater field-level impact.

**Contingency plan for fire evacuation needs to be implemented in factories as priority. Buildings which have changed their occupancy to be run as factory should be retrofitted to meet the National building-code requirements. That's how one can be sure about the safety of the worker.**

**SK Dheri**

**Ex Chief Fire Officer, Delhi Fire Services**



# Safe Working Conditions: What more do we need to do?

## Discussion Points

- Build worker confidence to prompt the safety culture and while measuring and enhancing the effectiveness of the engagement (via tools already proven with sizeable results in different environments/sectors)
- Create safety-awareness programs through collaborations with various associations in textile and footwear manufacturing life-cycle
- Measure training effectiveness (via tools already proven with sizeable results in different environments/sectors)
- Endorse knowledge-transfer efforts for a preventive safety culture.

## Discussion Outcomes

- Drive collaboration to enhance the preventive safety culture and curtail the behavioral safety issues
- Worker empowerment via training to understand risks and provide ways to raise safety concerns
- Capacity building with safety-expert intervention and collaborating with skilled development agencies and industry associations to create systems and modules to be disseminated effectively at the worker level.

**Apparel and footwear sector has come a long way increasing the business footprint; however safety was less of a priority for a long time, however we can see a progress in the way safety is actioned. Efforts to help factories to drive safe working conditions, especially with women workers in focus, is needed and case studies in these forums would build the understanding of how a factory can achieve transformation.”**

**Rita Menon**

**Secretary (Retired), Ministry of Textiles  
Government of India**





**We have clusters of old and new factories, hence investing on upgrading them to meet the safety requirements, will need us to invest from INR 25 Lac to INR 3 Cr (30K - 300K Euro) per factory. It took some time for us realise that it is an investment and new factories built by the group will have a focus on safety requirements based on our learnings and aligning with the National Building Code requirements.”**

**- Shahi Export Group**

**There is need for a strong enforcement of regulations in the industry to drive the safety norms which are legally required for the factory to operate. Consider the worker as stakeholder in driving safety, preventive safety culture to be developed and move away from mindset of safety as second priority.”**

**- H&M Retail**



**Safety to be imbibed as a culture in life and it needs to be the new normal. India has sound safety regulation and standards developed. However, they are technical in nature which needs expertise to understand and coordinate the effort. Hence, a program such as LABS is supporting Gap, Inc. drive this aspect by helping factories in making changes in the system to be safe working spaces. More brands joining hands would make safety culture implementation easier and more effective. PSAFI as a platform can drive the collaboration to support smallest of the factories in driving the safety culture.”**

**Kapil Mathur**

**Director - ESG at Gap, Inc.**

**One of the major root cause of the safety risk is behavioral and safety cannot be considered as optional in the business of production. The commitment of the leadership plays a crucial role in developing the safety culture.”**

**Jose Prakash**

**Sustainable Operations Manager-South Asia  
VF Corporation**





### Actionable Outcomes

- Safety awareness inspires a safety culture in the sector by way of good practice sharing
- Create avenues to encourage factories who effectively demonstrate safety culture in the sector
- Develop focused action items to prompt sector governance and produce field-level impact
- Share success stories of field-level impact at future gatherings
- Participants shared their positive view on the need for a platform such as PSAFI to inspire discussions focusing on safety in the sector
- Participants expressed a need for the stakeholders (in their various roles in different capacities) to collaborate on capacity building at the factories and try to make an inclusive effort to cater to the MSME sector
- Develop ways, such as training, to build capacity within the factory to encourage the safety culture
- Consider gender inclusivity for all engagement efforts

### Next Steps

- Unite participants and potential stakeholders to understand the possibility of capacity-building efforts at various levels
- Ally with participants and potential stakeholders to strategize on how worker empowerment can be induced by training them on safety risks due to fire, electrical, and structural issues
- Engagement with potential stakeholders to align on their collaborative capacity with respect to implementation of outcome.

# Event in Pictures



