

Hell-bent for leather

Labour conditions in the leather industry in Pakistan



SOMO & NOWCommunities

December 2016

Colophon

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Amsterdam, December 2016

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Executive summary

In Pakistan, leather is produced under deplorable conditions. Labourers work for long hours for low wages. Many suffer damage to their health, working with chemicals and unsafe heavy machinery. The European Union (EU) is the single most important export destination for Pakistani leather, and a sizeable portion of these imports goes to the Netherlands.

Pakistan falls under the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), a trade scheme that aims to stimulate the protection of human rights by exempting specific developing countries from trade tariffs, on the condition that they ratify and implement core international conventions relating to human and labour rights, the environment and good governance. While Pakistan's leather industry has profited from this, interviews with workers reveal that they are still facing a wide range of labour rights violations.

During the tanning process (when animal hides are turned into leather), workers are often exposed to the chemical chromium, which can cause various health issues, including skin infections and respiratory diseases. Under Pakistani law, employers are obliged to provide protective equipment for people working with chromium.¹ Through surveys and in-depth interviews with tannery workers in Karachi, it became clear that simple protective gear such as gloves and masks are often not being provided. In other cases, protective equipment is provided but workers are not informed about the need to use it, nor are they obliged to do so by their employers. As a consequence, many of the interviewed workers reported that they or their colleagues were suffering from diseases associated with chemicals used in the tanning process.

Another hazard that leather workers face is related to the use of heavy machinery during different stages in the production process. Safety training is said to be lacking and the equipment, such as industrial pressing machines, is not properly covered, leading to accidents. Interviewees recalled there had been a number of cases where workers lost their hands or arms while operating machinery under stress to meet production quotas.

In addition to the dangerous working conditions they face, Karachi's leather workers also struggle to make ends meet because of their low wages. Several workers reported that their wage was slightly below the minimum wage, which is set at 14,000 Pakistani Rupees per month (€ 119 at the time of the interviews). Many live from pay check to pay check and resort to taking out loans to cover basic expenses. While overtime work could serve as a source of additional income, some workers indicated that their forced overtime hours are unpaid. It is difficult for workers to force employers to respect their labour rights because they are often hired through labour contractors and lack any documentation proving that they are employed by the factory they work in. This allows factory owners to fire protesting workers with impunity. Employees also said that their supervisors at times fire union members, as well as bullying them by assigning them to more difficult workstations.

Following these research findings, companies sourcing leather and leather products from Pakistan should make sure they conduct thorough supply chain due diligence to ensure that the leather

they use in their consumer products is produced in a manner that respects the human rights of the workers who produce it. SOMO and NOWCommunities therefore urge Pakistan's government to uphold its responsibilities, especially regarding freedom of association, as well as health and safety.

Although leather exports have been supported through GSP+, this is not providing much-needed protection to the Pakistani workers producing leather. The EU should improve its monitoring mechanism in order to gain a good understanding about progress (or lack thereof) made by beneficiary countries with regard to the implementation of human and labour rights conventions. Furthermore, the list of conventions that GSP+ states need to comply with should include conventions concerning occupational health and safety and the right to a living wage. Doing so will enhance the effectiveness of trade preference schemes like GSP+ to stimulate respect for human rights.

1 The research

1.1 Introduction

The leather industry in Pakistan employs about 500,000 people,² many of whom face precarious employment and deplorable working conditions. The leather produced accounts for 5.4 per cent of Pakistan's total exports,³ with close to half ending up in clothing and accessories sold in Europe.⁴ This briefing paper aims to provide information about the conditions facing Pakistani leather workers, specifically those involved in the leather tanning process. For this research, 160 leather tannery workers in the city of Karachi were interviewed about their work.



Leather jacket manufacturing and stitching work shop.

1.2 Methodology

To gain insight into the issues faced by Pakistan's leather workers, tannery workers were interviewed in two separate periods, during August and October of 2016. In August, the Karachi-based NGO NOWCommunities held interviews with a total of 73 male and 43 female workers. These workers were spread over 17 export-oriented leather companies, including tanneries as well as leather goods factories. The interviews were supplemented by focus group discussions, in which 77 male and 70 female workers participated.

In October 2016, a second fieldwork visit to Karachi's leather tanneries took place. Researchers were joined by photographer and Asim Rafiqui, who conducted 13 in-depth interviews with leather workers. All 13 of these interviewees were employed by the same factory.

Asim Rafiqui also took video footage and photographs of working conditions in another leather factory, where labour conditions were found to be similar to those of the interviewed workers. None of the workers from this second factory were interviewed due to concerns for those workers' security. The photos and videos take in the above-mentioned factory are the origin of the pictures shown in this briefing.

During the field research, workers were interviewed outside the factories or tanneries they worked in to ensure their anonymity and safety. To further guarantee their anonymity, neither the workers' names nor the factories they work in have been mentioned in this report.

2 Export of Pakistani leather

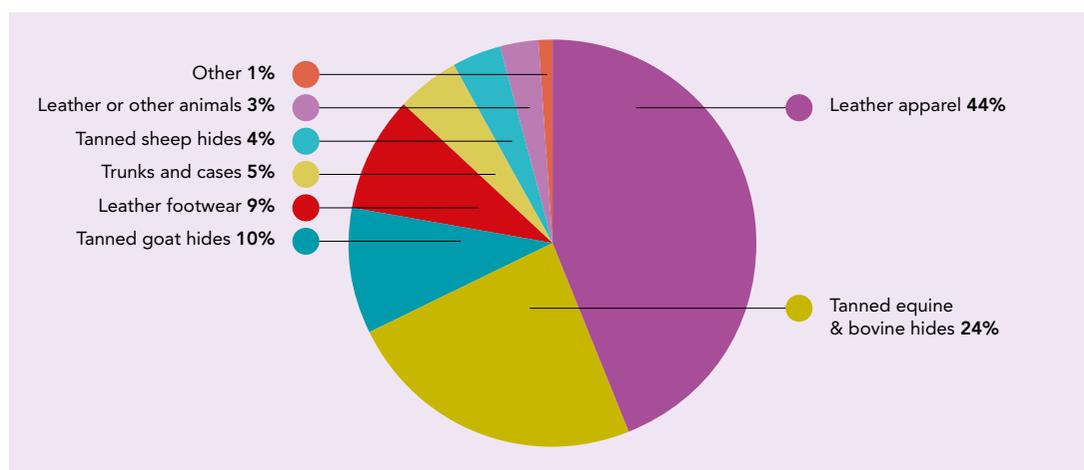
2.1 Leather exports

In 2015, Pakistan exported a total of €1.1 billion⁵ worth of leather products,⁶ consisting of products ranging from leather footwear to tanned cow, goat and bovine hides. With total exports of €20.6 billion⁷ per year, leather exports accounted for 5.4 per cent of Pakistan's export trade.

Compared to 2014, the 2015 exports represented a 0.6 per cent increase. In 2014, total exports were valued at €26.3 billion⁸, and leather exports at €1.3 billion⁹, meaning leather comprised a 4.8 per cent share in total exports.¹⁰ Pakistan's leather and animal hide imports for 2014 were valued at about €161.8 million¹¹, meaning most of the hides and the leather were produced domestically. The share of each type of leather product as part of total leather exports in 2014 is shown in Figure 1 (at the time of writing, these data were not yet available for 2015).

In terms of leather exports to the EU, Italy is an important destination for tanned equine, bovine,¹² and goat hides.¹³ For finished or semi-finished Pakistani leather products – including leather footwear, trunks and cases and apparel – Germany and France are important export markets, with exports to those countries respectively totalling €180.7 and €71.2 million.¹⁴

Figure 1 Pakistan's leather exports, 2014¹⁵



Export of leather products to the Netherlands is more limited, corresponding to the country's size: in 2014 the Netherlands imported €35.6 million's worth of Pakistani leather apparel, €3.3 million's worth of leather footwear, €1.5 million's worth of leather trunks and cases and €1.3 million's worth¹⁶ of tanned equine and bovine hides.¹⁷ This indicates that most of the Pakistani leather imported

into the Netherlands in the form of leather apparel is sold to consumers by the country's clothing retailers. Visits to several clothes stores in Amsterdam confirmed that they sell Pakistani produced leather apparel.

A relevant caveat of the trade data used is that a percentage of the leather exported from Pakistan, especially the tanned hides, will not be sold to consumers in the country they are exported to. Instead, they will be processed and then exported further, with possibly even larger amounts ending up in the Netherlands.

2.2 Generalised Scheme of Preferences+

In order to stimulate trade between the European Union and developing countries, the EU follows what it calls a Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), which allows a number of selected countries to export specific products to the EU without trade tariffs being levied.¹⁸ An addition to this, called GSP+,¹⁹ expands the product categories that are eligible for such trade tariff reductions for countries that ratify and implement specific international conventions focused on human and labour rights.²⁰ Pakistan is one of the countries that enjoys GSP+ benefits, which has allowed 76 per cent of its exports to the EU, including clothing and leather,²¹ to enter the EU under reduced tariffs.²²

In order to be eligible for the GSP+ scheme, countries are required to sign, ratify and implement 27 international conventions on human and labour rights, including conventions against child labour, forced labour and torture.²³ With regard to Pakistani leather workers, perhaps the most relevant conventions Pakistan has had to implement are those for the protection of freedom of association²⁴ and collective bargaining,²⁵ the convention against employment discrimination,²⁶ and the convention against forced or compulsory labour.²⁷ However, Pakistan's enforcement of the labour rights enshrined in these conventions has reportedly been lacking.²⁸ One example of this is that, while workers may be legally permitted to join unions, they are required to show an appointment letter from their employer in order to do so, which many employers fail to provide.²⁹

The EU states that, by stimulating the implementation of human and labour rights conventions, GSP+ is designed to support sustainable development among developing countries that are not eligible for the regular GSP arrangement.³⁰ The GSP+ system makes the application of preferential trade tariffs dependent on the ratification and implementation of human rights in applicant countries.

However, it remains unclear how this implementation is monitored and enforced by the EU, as the European Commission does not make its deliberations public. Furthermore, if a participating country is found to be failing in the implementation of GSP+'s associated human and labour rights conventions, EU sanctions against them will be deferred, supposedly to encourage improvement.³¹ While the GSP+ arrangement has allowed Pakistan's leather industry to be more internationally competitive, it does not appear to have led to sustainable development in the sector, as shall be illustrated further on in this briefing.

3 Leather production in Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the biggest producers of hides and leather in the world. In 2013³², the country produced over 430,000 tonnes of animal hides and skins from cows, buffalo, goats and sheep.³³ Animals are mostly kept by herders on a small scale, with animal hides being a by-product of meat production.³⁴ To produce leather, hides are transported to leather tanneries where they are processed using an array of different chemicals, as well as heavy machinery used to press and flatten the leather. Annually, 85 per cent of leather produced in Pakistan is said to be exported, with little over half of it leaving the country as leather goods – like garments or footwear – and the rest as finished leather.³⁵

Many Pakistani leather companies, including some of those covered by this research, have vertically integrated the process of tanning and the production of leather clothing and apparel.³⁶ Most leather tanneries in Pakistan are located in Sialkot, Lahore and Karachi.³⁷

3.1 The leather tanning process

The tanning of animal hides takes place in several stages. In the first of these, the wet-blue process, hides are put into large wooden drums filled with water and the chemical chromium, which is then set to spin slowly for a period varying from two to 24 hours.³⁸ When this process is finished, the drums are opened and the hides, covered in chromium-laden water, are taken out and collected by tannery workers. The hides come out of the drums both wet and blue, hence the name wet-blue.



Fresh 'wet blue' leather arrives at the unloading docks.

After the tanning process, the wet-blue hides are drained, rinsed and dried, and, in some cases, stretched. Subsequently, the hides are 'shaved' in a machine to even out the thickness. This is followed by a number of 'wet finishing' steps. The hides are prepared for further processing through neutralisation of the pH level. They then undergo a so-called 'retanning' process, which makes the leather more suitable for dyeing – the step that follows immediately after, where paint is applied to the hides to change their colour. Since the aforementioned processes cause the leather to lose its fat content, dyeing is followed by 'fatliquoring' process, in which oil (animal, vegetable or mineral oil) is used to lubricate the leather. The leather is then dried, which results in a tradable, intermediate product called crust leather. Crust leather goes through a process of 'dry finishing' in which the appearance and properties for end use are improved. This can involve the application of a surface coat, and mechanical processes like polishing, dedusting and flattening. The leather is then ready to be used in the production of garments, shoes and a wide variety of other manufactured products.³⁹

4 Rights violations in leather production

4.1 Long working hours, low wages

When workers were asked about the main challenges they faced in relation to their work, the most common answer was that their wages did not cover their cost of living. In the interviews carried out in August 2016, 94 per cent of the 116 workers stated they make just equal to or less than the legal minimum wage,⁴⁰ set at 14,000 Pakistani Rupees a month, or €119 at the time of the interviews.⁴¹ Of these 116 workers, 77 per cent said they were paid on a daily basis, while the rest said they were paid a piece rate. Several workers, reported they made 13,800 Rupees a month, which is slightly below the legal minimum wage. These workers also stated they all made the same amount regardless of experience meaning that workers with 30 years' experience earned the same as those on their first day in the factory.

Although the 14,000 Rupees a month wage is the legally allowed minimum in Pakistan, workers said it was still not enough to survive on. In fact, it was said that 14,000 Rupees a month was not enough to buy three meals a day, let alone to rent a house or feed a family. As a result of this, workers said they had been forced to move in with family members. The Asia Floor Wage campaign calculates that the minimum monthly living wage in Pakistan for 2015 stands at 31,197 Rupees, or about €278,⁴² more than twice what the interviewed leather workers make.⁴³

The inability to provide for their own livelihoods led some of the interviewed factory workers to repeatedly take out loans with their employers. Some said that they now had to pay off parts of their loan with their salary every month, causing them to run out of money after the first 10 to 12 days of the month, at which point they were required to borrow again. In order to supplement their salary, several said they had asked their children to start working.

“The worker who since the past 50 years has been surviving on loans is still at the same position while the owners have made 10 factories from 1.”

Tannery worker

When asked what salary would be sufficient to cover their cost of living, several leather workers stated that 25,000 to 35,000 Rupees a month would be a reasonable salary to survive in the slums of Karachi. During the in-depth interviews in October 2016 it became clear that the low wages the workers received went hand in hand with long working hours. They mentioned that previously they had worked eight-hour days with an additional two hours of daily compulsory overtime, for which they were compensated. This system has recently been replaced with a quota system, where workers are paid their regular daily hours if they manage to meet their quota. However, the quota had been set so high that workers are now required to work the same amount of overtime just to meet the quota, thus cancelling out the much-needed overtime payments. Because they have to work so fast to meet their quota, several workers said they often work for four consecutive hours without taking any breaks to go to the bathroom or to drink water, even though the temperature inside the factory is often very high, leading to severe dehydration. Furthermore, workers stated that there was a strict

policy in place where workers who showed up even one minute late for work would have their wages for the day cut in half, or would even be sent home.

“They will give us production goals to meet. If we do not, they punish us by sending us to more harsh departments. This is one of the methods they have used from the start to get their way.”

Tannery worker

4.2 Precarious work

Workers have very limited contact with the management of the factories they work in, and are often completely unaware of who actually owns the factory. They are usually hired through labour contractors – people who are said to trawl villages and city neighbourhoods looking for unemployed people to draw into the leather industry. Often they do not have a legal contract binding them to the factory they work in. The research done in August 2016 revealed that only 5 per cent of the interviewed leather workers had any type of written contract proving their employment. Often, the only documentation tying workers to their de facto employer is a so-called duty card, which they use to enter the factory every day. Yet, these duty cards were said rarely to contain any information identifying the factory employing the worker, and at times reportedly even list the wrong factory name.

The absence of a labour contract increases the precariousness of their work, as the factories they work in can hire and fire them through their labour contractors. The workers’ inability to claim their labour rights appears to have provided the factories with near impunity to fire whoever they please. This was exemplified by one of the interviewees’ stories, who had been fired in 2002 and was still awaiting a court decision regarding his case. In 2002, he was involved in what he said was a legal strike organised by the union of which he was a member. Over 700 workers had participated, but the factory’s management had fired only him and seven other union members. At the time of the interview, 14 years later, he was still unemployed, living off irregular work, although he remained a member of the union. The problems workers face due to dismissals is further compounded by the lack of alternative employment opportunities. This makes it difficult for workers to stand up for their rights.

In general, leather companies are not open to union activities in their factories. Through the survey it was found that around 35 per cent of respondents were aware of a union in their factory, while close to 14 per cent said they were themselves a member of the union. It was not possible to gauge these unions’ effectiveness in advocating their members’ rights through the field research, nor was it possible to determine whether they are generally worker-led or management-led unions.

In the in-depth interviews, several interviewees stated that workers had been fired, had salary deductions, or had been moved to more difficult workstations for being union members. It was also said that the union was not acknowledged as a legitimate negotiation partner by the management.

Union busting

A tannery worker: "I was not well enough to lift weight. Doctors advised me not to. But they forced me to do that because I was a part of a union. Because of this I even had a bypass in 2010. ... I had no other choice. I had to raise my children. Doctors have still advised me not to lift weight but they force me. What other choice do I have? I told [management]: you are being unjust to me. They said you are with the union, you like to criticize, and asked me to go back to my work."



4.3 Chemicals and heavy machinery, but no protective equipment

The leather industry makes extensive use of chemicals to transform animal hides into leather. Several of these – including chromium used to tan hides, as well as paints used to colour them – can be damaging to human health. Often, workers come into direct contact with such chemicals, for example, in the above-mentioned wet-blue process when the hides are taken out of their chromium bath. Workers are also exposed to these chemicals in gaseous form, when they dissolve within the tannery.⁴⁴ To use just one example, exposure to chromium increases the risk of skin infections, can cause chromium ulcers, can cause workers' skin to start to peel, possibly creating so-called chrome holes. It can also cause perforation of the nasal septum and respiratory illnesses, as well as increasing the risk of lung and nasal cancer, among other problems.⁴⁵

In this research, workers were found to be unaware of the exact health impacts of the chemicals they work with. In fact, they were unable to name most of the chemicals they work with. They did, however, experience the health impacts caused by those chemicals. Through survey interviews in 17 factories, it was found that 47 per cent of the respondents think their health has been



A tannery working picking colored hides out of the dyeing drums, without shoes or any protective equipment.

damaged by their work: with 41 per cent suffering from respiratory problems; 15 per cent suffering from hearing issues; 10 per cent suffering from skin-related issues; and 8 per cent suffering from backaches, with many workers suffering from several of these issues. Compounding these health issues, 83 per cent said that no medical benefits or facilities were provided by their employer; 56 per cent said they were not entitled to sick leave; and 63 per cent also said they were not allowed to take unpaid leave of any sort.

“The workers do not even know the harms of these chemicals or the diseases they can cause.”

Tannery worker

In the in-depth interviews it was said that those who work with chemicals at times suffered from hair loss. One interviewee stated, “we have to sacrifice our hair”. Another worker referred to the spray paint used to colour hides, saying that – because of a lack of proper covering – the spray paint would get into their eyes and lungs, irritating the eyes and causing coughing fits.



At the color mix lab.

A worker from one of the factories estimated that 70-75 per cent of his colleagues were constantly sick, suffering from heart problems,⁴⁶ skin rashes, jaundice and allergic reactions caused by the chemicals, and could all feel their health deteriorating further. It was said that workers had to go to a state hospital on a regular basis, but that this was always done during their free time because otherwise their pay would be docked by their employer. These state hospitals were said to be free, but reportedly could not provide the workers with cures for their illnesses.

“Yes, all of the workers are sick. Nobody is in good health.”

Tannery worker

Another hazard workers face in leather factories is when they have to work with heavy machinery without proper training or safety measures in place. Through the surveys, it was found that 50 per cent of workers had been given training on how to work with the heavy machinery in their factory. A third of the interviewees stated that heavy machinery in their factories had not been covered properly, as was required to avoid accidents. For example, machines used to flatten tanned hides had pressing mechanisms that were not covered, creating the risk that workers' hands operating the machines could slip in and be crushed.⁴⁷



Men pass the newly arrived leather through a pressing and scraping machine. If their hands accidentally slip into the machine, they will be utterly crushed.

Muhammad's story

Muhammad suffered from acute kidney failure that started 14 years ago. At the time he was working with a so-called toggle machine in the tannery, in an extremely hot environment. He was suffering from constant dehydration because of it. He has been on dialysis ever since his kidneys failed, which has kept him alive. Meanwhile, he has continued to work in the same factory although he has been moved to a less strenuous workstation. He has not received any compensation for his illness, and has been forced to schedule his dialysis outside working hours. If his dialysis treatment interferes with his working hours, he says, his employer will dock his pay.



Interviewees reported in the in-depth interviews that there had been cases of workers losing their arms working with such machines. They had then received no compensation from the factory, and were said to be back to working in the same factories. However, the injured workers were often no longer able to meet the production quota, because they were required to do the same amount of work, in spite of their injuries.

Under Pakistani law, companies are required to provide protective equipment for their workers, such as rubber gloves and rubber boots for wet-blue workers.⁴⁸ However, when asked during the survey, 39 per cent of workers said their employers did not provide them with protective equipment. It is not clear whether the remaining 61 per cent of workers with access to protective equipment actually use this equipment, or are aware of how use it properly.

The in-depth interviews showed that the factory where those workers were employed did not provide any protective equipment to their employees. Workers who work with chemicals do not wear face masks or protective gloves. Several workers stated they did not wear face masks and gloves because they were uncomfortable to wear. This may point to a lack of knowledge regarding the health effects of the chemicals they work with. Furthermore, when asked about safety training, workers said they had only been given instructions on fire safety rules, but not about protective equipment.



Signs apparently urging workers to wear protective equipment, yet both workers in the photo are not wearing any gloves or masks.

Several workers stated that their bosses provided them with protective equipment only on specific occasions, when inspectors were scheduled to visit the factory. On such occasions, workers were temporarily made to wear gloves, boots, facemasks, goggles or helmets, depending on their workstations. Workers said that, when such inspections took place, management staff took the inspector on a walk through the factory, not speaking to any of the workers. Once the inspector left, all protective equipment was collected again and put away until the next inspection.

When asked if they ever protested against the labour practices in their factory, one worker said that management's response to such complaints was to temporarily outsource part of their production to factories in Karachi's Korangi neighbourhood. The worker said that Korangi's leather workers did even more precarious work under even worse circumstances, although with slightly higher pay. This reaction from the factory's management was perceived by the workers as a warning not to complain.

5 Conclusion

The research findings shown above demonstrate how leather workers in Pakistan struggle to make a living while working long hours under stress to meet production quotas. The leather production process involves hazardous work with chemicals and heavy machinery. It was documented how workers suffer damage to their health due to a lack of protective equipment or proper safety measures. Furthermore, workers were found to be unable to form effective unions, due to bullying of union members and outright union busting activities by their factories' management. In light of these findings, SOMO and NowCommunities have formulated several recommendations to relevant stakeholders:

The government of Pakistan should develop, implement and enforce national labour and human rights laws and legal regulations, in accordance with international norms and standards, to address the labour issues described in this report. The Government of Pakistan has ratified the eight fundamental labour conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and should thus make sure that national legislation is in line with these conventions and, equally important, that there is an effective labour inspectorate equipped with the necessary resources to conduct regular inspections for adherence to labour legislation. Moreover, as a beneficiary of the EU's GSP+ scheme, Pakistan's Government has committed to implement core human rights and labour rights, including the right for workers to form unions and the right for unions to engage in collective bargaining with companies on behalf of their members.

As this research shows, workers in the leather industry are confronted with serious occupational health and safety risks and are meanwhile unable to cover their living costs. Considering the severe implications of chromium use to workers' health, the Government of Pakistan is urged to enforce existing legislation on the use of the chemical obliging employers to provide protective equipment to their workers, such as the 2003 Hazardous Substances Rules.⁴⁹

The Government of Pakistan has not ratified important conventions on the issues of occupational health and safety, or conventions concerning workers' wages. It is recommended that the Government of Pakistan should ratify and implement ILO Convention 155 regarding the right to a safe and healthy work environment, Convention 121 on employment injury benefits, Convention 131 on fixing a minimum wage covering the cost of living, and Convention 95 on the protection of wages.⁵⁰

The European Union should improve the monitoring of the human rights and labour rights component of GSP+ to ensure that rights such as those of workers to form and join unions and to bargain collectively are respected by countries participating in the trade preference scheme. The first step in this process should be to improve transparency over how implementation of core human and labour rights conventions in participating countries is monitored and evaluated.⁵¹ Furthermore, the EU should expand the list of conventions that GSP+ participants are required to ratify and implement to at least include rights conventions concerning occupational health and safety and the right to a living wage, since Pakistan's leather workers seem in dire need of these rights.

Brand companies, retailers and manufacturers sourcing leather and leather products from Pakistan should consider labour rights and especially the severe health damage the Pakistan leather industry inflicts on its workers on a daily basis. They should conduct thorough supply chain due diligence to ensure that the leather they use in their consumer products is produced in a manner that respects the human rights of the workers who produce it. This means that companies need to proactively look into the human rights risks of their activities, including their supply chain and business relations, and develop strategies to address these risks.



Men prepare animal hair, left over from the leather preparation process, for sale to retailers. The hairs are dried outdoors for several days and sold to manufacturers of mattresses and other such household products.”

Endnotes

- 1 International Labour Organization website, "Pakistan>Occupational safety and health", "Hazardous Substances Rules 2003" unofficial translation, <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=84576&p_country=PAK&p_classification=14>
- 2 The Express Tribune, "Leather industry in tatters following global slowdown", 29 September 2015, <<http://tribune.com.pk/story/963921/animal-hides-glut-leather-industry-in-tatters-following-global-slowdown/>>
- 3 Ibid
- 4 This was the case in 2014. Data from Observatory of Economic Complexity.
- 5 This figure was converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 6 UN Comtrade, Raw hides and skins and leather were exported for a total value of about €395.3 million, while articles of leather; saddlery and harness; travel goods, handbags and similar containers; articles of animal gut (other than silkworm gut) were exported for a total value of approximately €638.9 million, adding up to €1.1 billion.
- 7 This figure was converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 8 This figure was converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 9 This figure was converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 10 The Observatory of Economic Complexity website, "Pakistan", 2014 data <<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pak/>>
- 11 This figure was converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 12 With a value of €22.8 million, comprising 12 per cent of total Pakistani export of tanned equine and bovine hides, most goes to Hong Kong (20 per cent), China (19 per cent) and India (8 per cent).
- 13 With a value of €41.5 million, comprising 17 per cent of total Pakistani export of tanned goat hides, most goes to China (19 per cent), Hong Kong (16 per cent), and South Korea (6.6 per cent).
- 14 These figures were converted from US Dollars to Euros using the currency exchange rate on 7 December 2016, retrieved from <<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=1&From=USD&To=EUR>>
- 15 The Observatory of Economic Complexity website, "Pakistan", 2014 data <<http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pak/>>
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Hell-bent for leather

Labour conditions in the leather industry in Pakistan

Pakistani leather is produced under deplorable conditions. Labourers work for long hours for low wages, often handling harmful chemicals and heavy machinery without protective equipment. The majority of this leather ends up being exported to the European Union (EU).

The EU stimulates these exports through its Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+), which provides trade tariff reductions on the condition that Pakistan implements core international conventions relating to human and labour rights. However, as this report reveals, human and labour rights violations remain widespread across the country's leather industry.

Surveys and in-depth interviews with tannery workers in Karachi highlight several serious concerns related to health and safety, wages and freedom of association. Workers do not receive adequate protection from exposure to dangerous chemicals used in the tanning process; many appear to suffer from heart, skin and respiratory diseases as a consequence. Some work with dangerous machinery with little or no safety training. In return for their labour in these challenging conditions, workers are paid salaries far below the cost of living. Many live from pay check to pay check and resort to taking out loans to cover basic expenses. To make matters worse, it is difficult for workers to hold employers to account, since most lack documentation to prove their employment. In interviews, workers mentioned that members of trade unions are discriminated against at work.

