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Migrant Workers

We are working with our suppliers to eliminate fees for migrant workers in our supply chain.



Why

Some of Patagonia's suppliers in Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and South Korea hire foreign migrant workers (FMW) to take jobs in their factories. This is a common practice in relatively small countries where there aren't enough domestic workers to fill manufacturing jobs.

But more often than not, employers are using third-party labor brokers who charge foreign migrant workers thousands of dollars simply to get hired. These workers are desperately seeking jobs and are lured by the prospect of earning a wage several times what they are able to make in their home country, and labor brokers take advantage of this situation. After the workers pay the fee, they become vulnerable to bonded labor and forced labor while in a new country. Employers favor this system because the cost is paid largely by the worker.

At Patagonia, we see this problem mainly in our fabric mills in Taiwan. In almost all cases, our suppliers are hiring a sizable portion of their workforce from Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and/or Indonesia with the help of third-party labor brokers. We know these workers are being charged up to \$7,000 for their jobs, depending on their home country and on the labor broker. We are working with our suppliers to eliminate those fees.

In a broader context, we are working with our industry and industry organizations to improve migrant-worker conditions since these issues are widespread and require systemic changes that no one company can bring about alone.

Where We Are

Since 2013, we have had two employees who oversee all the work we do to limit these practices across our workforce—one based in Ventura, California, and one in Taiwan. Our Migrant Worker Program uses several strategies to drive change.

We developed Migrant Worker Employment Standards for our supply chain. These standards outline our expectations of ethical recruitment and employment practices with regard to migrant workers. We were one of the first apparel brands to develop a comprehensive migrant-worker standard in December 2014, and we made it available online. It has been adopted in part or in full by other brands. The standards were revised and further enhanced in October 2020 after being reviewed and analyzed by in-house and third-party experts, including Verité and the Fair Labor Association®. The updated standards capture recent guidance on migrant workers from the UN's International Labour Organization, the Fair Labor Association and the US government. You can find Version 2.0 at this link. We will continue to work with our suppliers to implement the standards in full.

We have an ongoing partnership with Verité, an expert supply chain NGO that is helping us with everything from understanding the hiring process and the employment laws to training our suppliers and auditing them.

We started a brand collaboration with other prominent outdoor and apparel companies to move the industry toward "responsible recruitment" in Taiwan. Getting the industry on board has made a significant impact on our progress.

We engage with the public sector, including governments and NGOs. For example, we work with the Taiwan Ministry of Labor and its Direct Hiring Service Center, which offers employers the ability to hire foreign migrant workers directly, eliminating the need for labor brokers. We also work with Finnwatch, a Finnish organization that focuses on human rights and the climate impacts of businesses, and their local partner in Thailand. Together we communicate about any worker issues that arise and look for viable solutions in partnership with our suppliers.

While much of this work is focused on Taiwan, our migrant-worker standards and program apply to our global supply chain.

What's Next

Our goal is to ensure that workers in our supply chain have not paid money for their jobs. This is an ongoing commitment for Patagonia and our suppliers. We work together to continuously monitor hiring and employment systems and to make sure workers are protected from recruitment fees and other exploitation.

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