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If profound change is to be achieved, programmes are needed that focus on empowering local people.

Our WE programme works with people in our supply chain factories to help them understand and defend their own rights.

Knowing your rights and articulating demands

The aim of the WE Programme is to improve working conditions in our supply chains in a lasting and self-sustaining way. It provides support for our producers, enabling them to meet and exceed the requirements of our Social and Environmental Code of Conduct (SCoC).

How does WE work exactly?

Human rights are complex

We don't just rely on audits to assess our suppliers. Recognising and preventing sexual harassment requires a different approach than fire safety measures. Human rights are not just a collection of facts. They are based instead on relationships. The key to improvement therefore lies in dialogue between all the people involved: our approach is to change relationships and ways of working in a way that protects human rights. In 2008, when the WE programme was launched, this approach was a real innovation.

The five human rights areas in WE

WE was developed from our evaluation of the human rights risks in our non-food supply chains and is based on the standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and international human rights conventions. The programme centres on those areas with the greatest need for improvement:

1. Wages and working hours
2. Freedom of association and workers’ representation
3. Discrimination and sexual harassment
4. Health and safety in the workplace
5. Modern slavery and child labour
• **Taking the factory as a starting point**

  The WE programme doesn’t follow a fixed pattern. It takes on a new form in each factory, depending on the problems encountered there or those specific to the sector. Right at the beginning of the WE programme, the participants in the factory are asked to define the problems that they feel are most pressing right at that moment. In doing so, they establish the order in which they want to work on the five human rights areas. We ensure that workers, their representatives and the factory managers always participate in the WE programme together.

  The programme always runs for at least two years at each factory; in every country except China, the programme is run on an ongoing basis. This means ensuring that a dialogue session is held at least every three months and that the development process as a whole does not stall.

• **Dialogue based on trust**

  WE is not a training programme – and we believe that dialogue doesn’t just mean getting people to talk to each other. It is a structured process aimed at creating a desirable future and encourages participants to be actively involved in it. WE works closely with local teams of dedicated experts who guide and oversee this process, ensuring that the participants feel completely safe throughout. These are our WE facilitators.

  Working alongside the WE facilitators, participants explore what their workplace and their relationship with each other should look like in the future, rather than focusing solely on current problems. This approach opens up new ways for them to change their reality. We help them to work together to find solutions. Whilst this process does take time, our experience tells us that it enables the people involved to implement the changes that need to be made in their workplaces.

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**Where is WE?**

The WE programme is active in factories in Bangladesh, China, India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Turkey and Vietnam. The factories produce clothing and textiles, leather goods, jewellery, electronics, furniture, metal products and kitchen utensils for Tchibo and other customers.

**Our results for 2021**

• **8 factories**

  have been newly included in the programme. A total of 432 factories have been involved since 2008, of which 96 factories are participating in the programme at the end of 2021. In 2021, 4,900 workers and managers participated in activities.

• **7 factories in China**

  have been re-integrated into the programme in 2021 to strengthen the permanent anchoring of the methods and mutual learning between the factories after years without WE activities carried out by Tchibo.
Fair Price Shops

In Bangladesh, so-called Fair Price Shops have been established in three factories, where workers can buy basic food products at a lower purchase price than the usual retail prices and thus have low expenses overall.

Financial expertise

In terms of content, we have included financial competence in India as well as mental wellbeing in India and Bangladesh, personal and organisational resilience training in Vietnam and diversity and inclusion in Turkey in the programme work.

In India, WE supported 13 factories

in setting up new grievance committees or improving existing ones in 2020. In 2021, new grievance committees were set up in two more factories. This is planned for four more factories in 2022.

Challenges we are continuously working on

Despite our continuous efforts to develop the programme over the years, some challenges remain. These are challenges familiar to other professionals in the field of human rights, transformation or development work:

Making the WE approach an integral part of factory life

We strive to ensure that the WE approach and thus the continuous improvement of working conditions is firmly established in all our factories. At the same time, we recognise that application of its methodologies and the work undertaken on it fades into the background, or indeed is forgotten entirely, if we do not oversee the work. This can even happen in factories that have made good improvements during the process. There can be a variety of reasons for this. Usually, there is a combination of underlying factors: a lack of commitment from company and factory management, other priorities in the day-to-day running of production operations, and staff turnover – including in middle management.

Our approach: We currently provide ongoing support to factories in every country with the exception of China. For China, we are in the process of drawing up a process that will enable us to have regular contact with factories, without having to oversee the programme in its entirety long-term. We are committed to establishing processes in the factories, empowering workers' representatives and involving trade unions.

Commitment of company management

The consent and support of a company's management is essential if we are to achieve as many lasting improvements as possible in the factories. This is not always achievable - in part because the companies in question are often large enterprises whose management is based in countries other than those where the factories are located.

Our approach: We engage with our fellow purchasers to stress the importance of the programme. The first measure taken in each factory is to inform and involve the factory management on a regular basis.
Reaching out to the entire workforce

Many factories in Asia have several thousand employees. This makes it impossible for us to include every individual worker in the programme. At the same time, the aim is to ensure that as many workers as possible are informed about their rights and benefit from the improvements.

Our approach: We are committed to establishing processes in the factories, empowering workers' representatives and involving trade unions. We carry out activities aimed at increasing the visibility of the work that is being done, such as poster parades in the canteen, for example.

Measuring impact

It is our experience that the WE programme works – often seen in the form of changes in behaviour. Traditional, quantitative impact measurement, which assumes simple mechanisms of action (activity A causes B), is often not capable of capturing this. Our work has taught us that interdependencies are often more complex. We are therefore looking for new ways of measuring impact, incorporating in particular the stories of those involved and their experiences.

What we have learned - and changed

2008

WE programme starts

Pilot phase with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)

2012

Integration in the Tchibo supply chain

Roll-out of the WE programme begins in 2012. In addition to the pilot countries Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand, we also set up the WE programme in Ethiopia, India, Cambodia, Turkey and Vietnam. By the end of 2015, 323 factories have been included in the programme.

2016

Refocus

At this point, as is not uncommon when undergoing expansion, we realise that we have now placed too much emphasis on quantity over quality in the expansion process: we put human rights issues and WE values (dialogue, empowerment and co-creation) firmly centre stage once more.

2018

Strengthening local teams

We continue to implement the changes introduced in 2016, whilst at the same time focusing on strengthening and linking up the local WE teams.

Since 2020

WE in the COVID-19 pandemic

Depending on the pandemic situation, the WE facilitators conduct the activities with workers and managers online, in a hybrid form between online and on-site, or in person, in strict compliance with national hygiene regulations.
Images from our WE training

- WE Factory Training in Bangladesh
- WE Workshop in China
- Training in India
- Internes WE Training bei Tchibo
- Internationale WE Konferenz in Hamburg
- Fabrik-Training in der Türkei

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