



ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR RMG WORKERS IN BANGLADESH: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

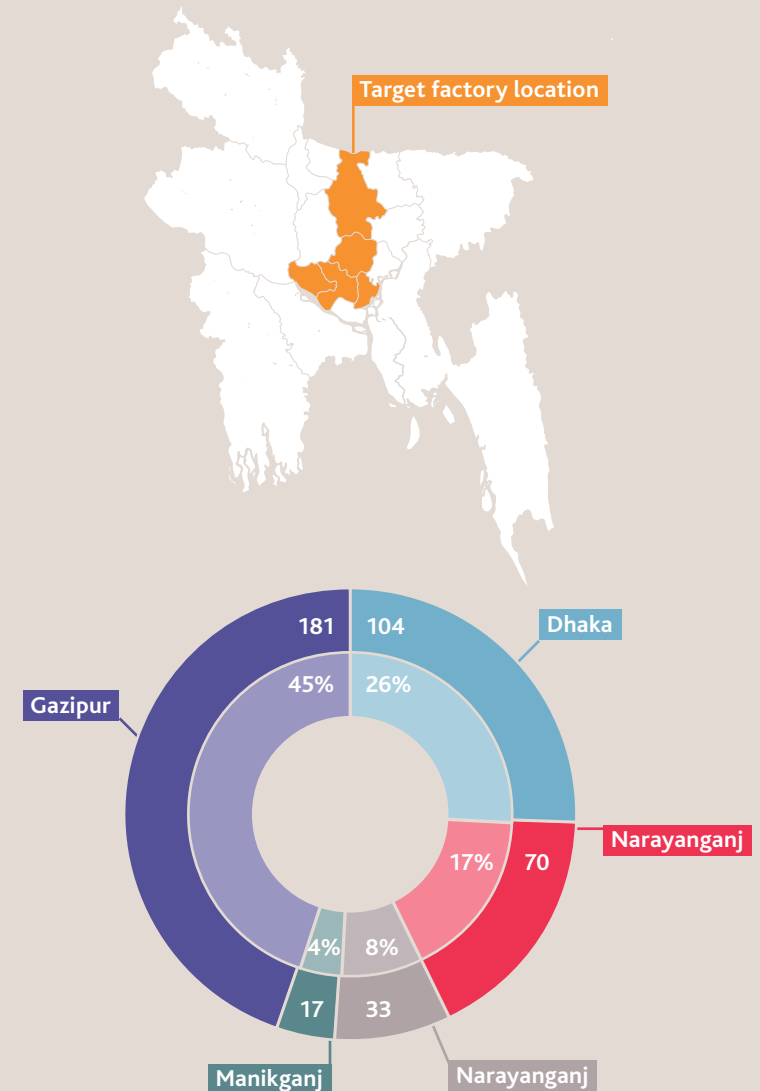
PROJECT PROFILE

ETI is part of a collaborative initiative introducing Social Dialogue Programmes to empower low-income workers to engage with workplace-based solutions in the vast global supply chain of the RMG sector. With approximately 60 percent of RMG workers identifying as female, examining the social norms and power relations in the home and at work through a gender lens is imperative.

ETI worked with Consiglieri Private Limited (CPL) to conduct a survey examining the patterns and obstacles present in accessing information for male and female workers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. There was a particular focus on access to information surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 405 RMG workers from 39 different factories in five different districts incl,

Dhaka, Narayanganj, Mymensingh, Manikganj and Gazipur took part. The majority of samples were taken from the Gazipur area, a major hub for RMG factories in Bangladesh. The final target sample consisted of 59 percent female and 41 percent male. The survey was conducted using a CTO mobile interview platform because face-to-face interviews were not possible during the pandemic.

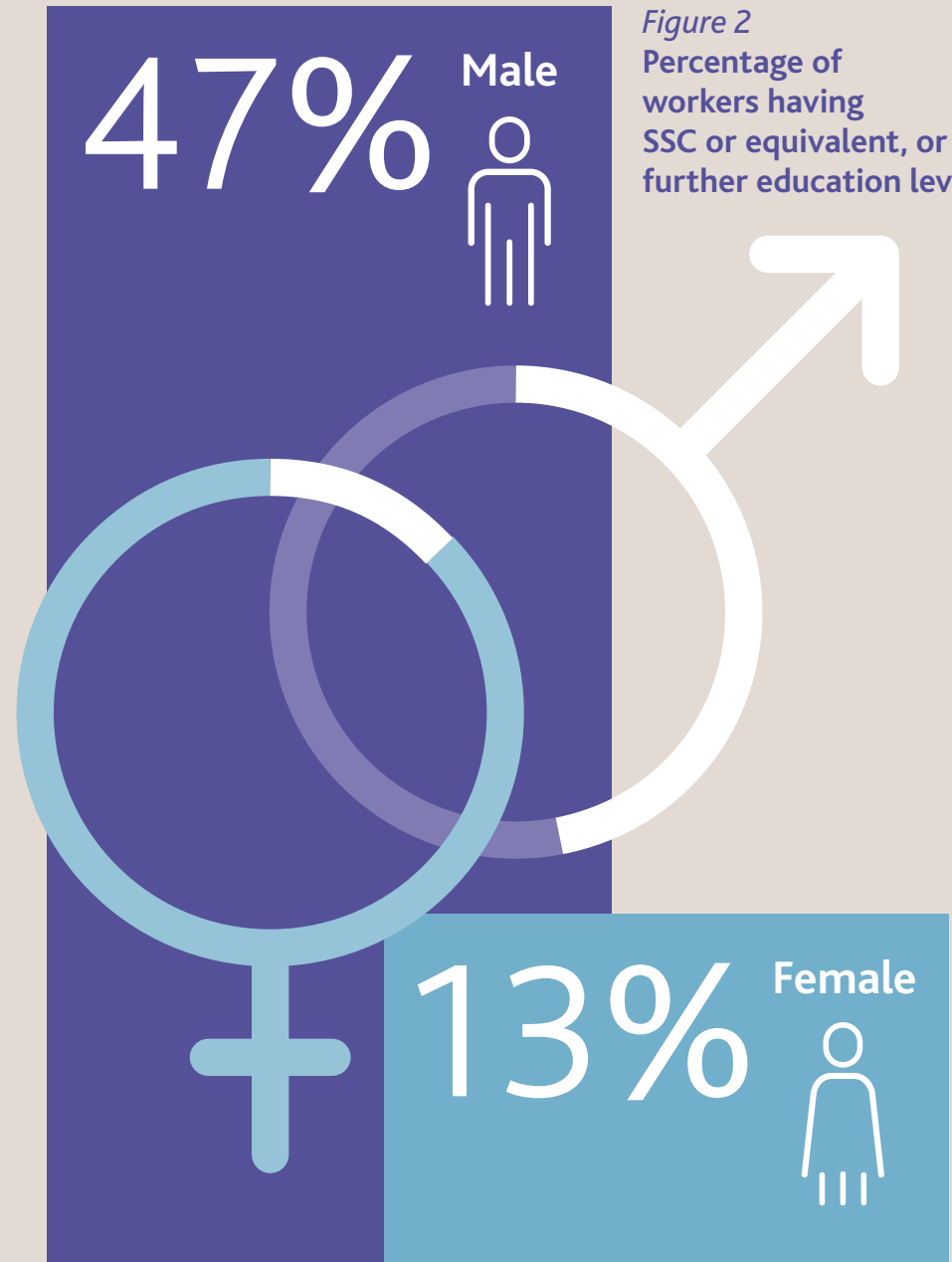
Figure 1
Geographical location of the target factories and sample workers



SOCIO- DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS OF SURVEY SAMPLE

The majority of survey respondents live in a traditional nuclear family consisting of a spouse and children, with households of 1-2 children the most common. Male RMG workers tend to have a higher level of education than their female co-workers, with most of the men obtaining up to SSC (Secondary School Certificate) level or the equivalent.

Eighty-nine percent of female RMG workers surveyed hold low-paid positions such as Helper and Operator leading to a lower average income for female respondents compared to male workers, who hold a greater proportion of the high-salaried positions, such as Line Head or Quality Controller. As a result, on average, male workers in the sample earn more than the females. However, in the sample there was no difference between income level for male or female workers holding the same positions.



KEY FINDINGS

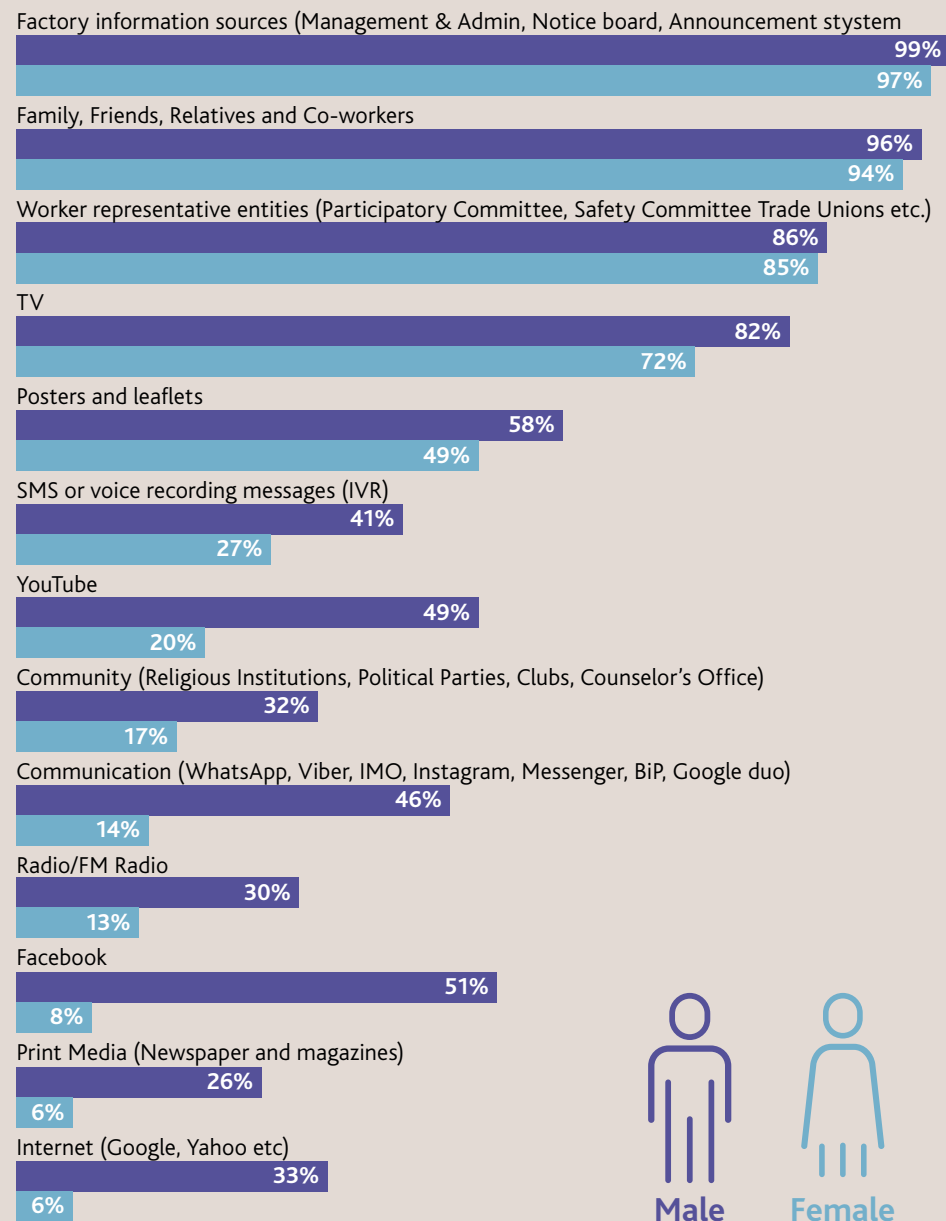
1.

Male RMG workers do, in fact, report more access to all forms of information sources than female workers. Male workers with a higher level of education are the group who use the internet, communication apps, and social media platforms for gaining information the most.

2.

The factory is still considered one of the main sources of reliable information for workers, followed closely by family & friends, and television. While workers report using online sources for entertainment, Factory Sources are trusted for information about workplace safety, Covid-19 protection, and grievance mechanisms, with workers mostly seeking information from supervisors, line managers and factory committees. Less than half of both male and female workers were aware of the national helpline services for addressing violence against women.

Figure 3: Use of information resources, by gender



3.

A large majority of workers surveyed were aware of mobile banking services and increased their use of these services during the pandemic due to many employers making salary payments online. There was a large discrepancy between male (92%) and female (75%) workers who had access to their own bank account to use such services.

4.

Major disparities were found among the male and female workers in access to modern ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). Female workers face more obstacles to accessing information than male workers, particularly via online sources and communication apps, which they reported having difficulty understanding and feeling uncomfortable operating. Female workers use the internet and other tech-based sources far less than male workers, due to limitations on ownership of their own devices, lack of time due to domestic responsibilities, and lack of interest and understanding of how to use these sources (see Figure 3).



5.

Workers with a higher level of education use information sources, particularly tech-based sources, significantly more than those with little or no education, and a correlation is present between the amount of time spent on social media and the higher education level of the workers (Figure 4, Figure 5).

Figure 4: Social media usage by educational level

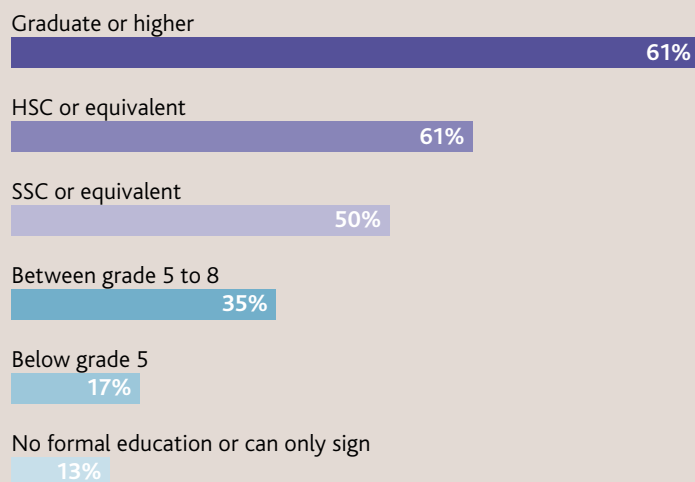
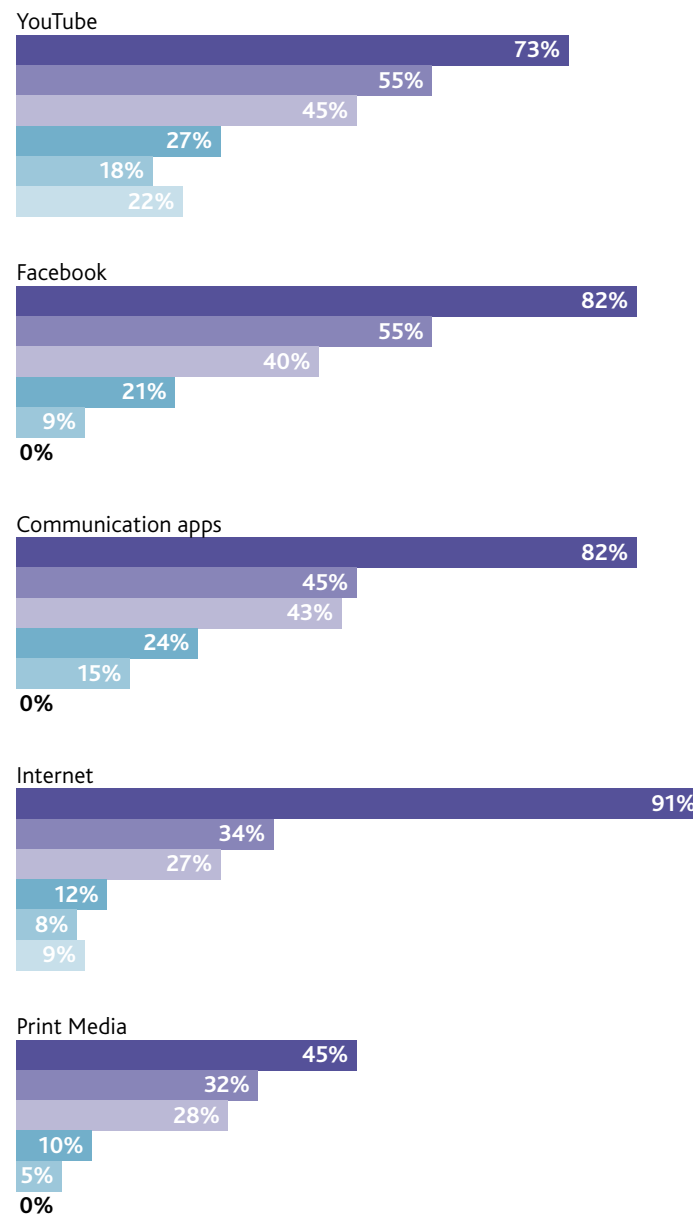


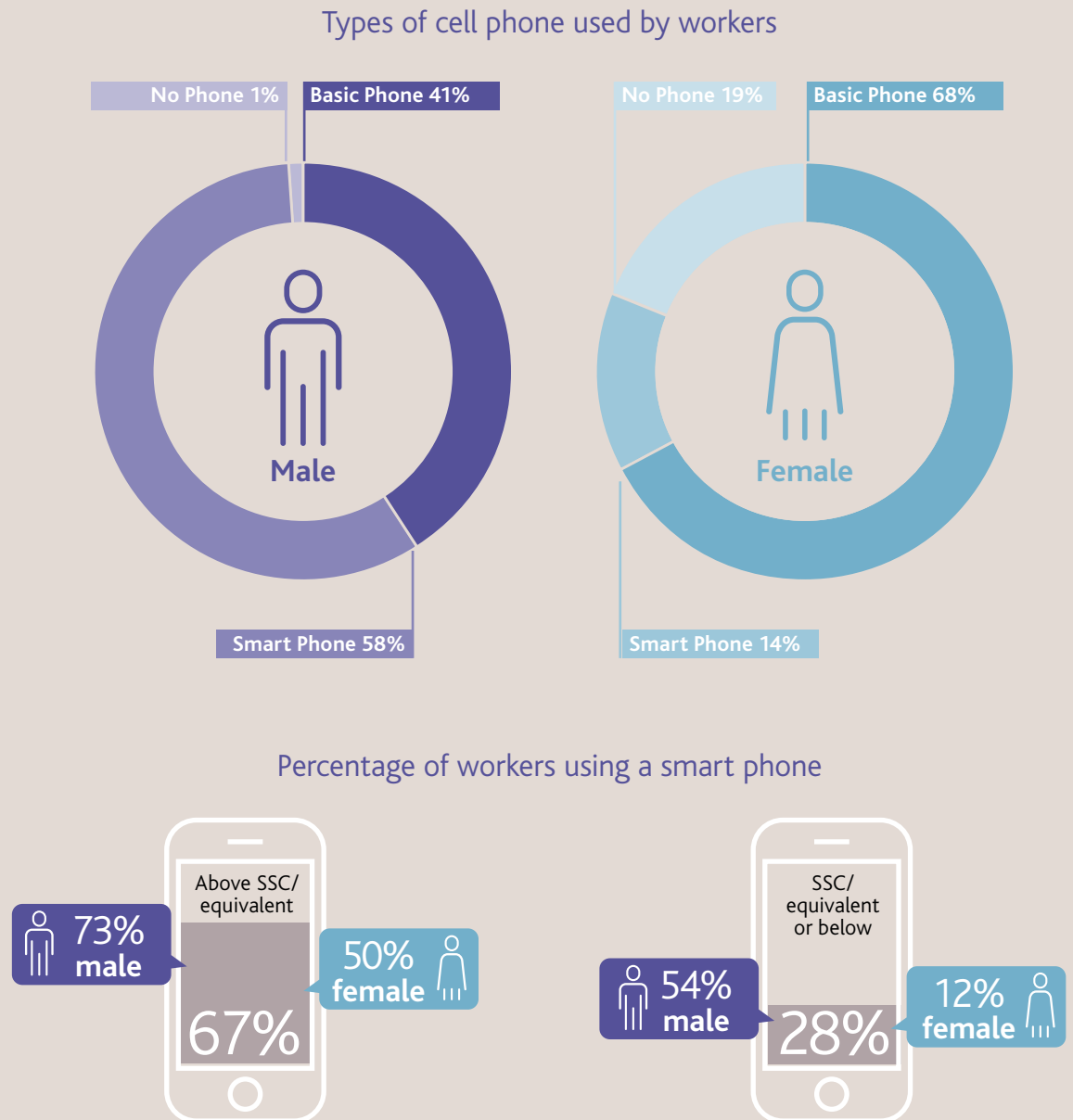
Figure 5: Use of information resources, by education level



6.

Only a small percentage of workers use a smartphone for accessing the internet and browsing. Most of the female workers use a basic cell phone, whereas the percentage of males owning a smartphone was significantly higher. Most of the female respondents said they could not afford a smartphone and were also not confident in operating one. (Figure 5, Figure 6)

Figure 6: Use of cell phone and smart phone



7.

However, while more male than female workers have access to social media, a higher percentage of women use social media than own a smartphone; many women access social media using a device belonging to a family member instead of their own device (Figure 7).

8.

Most users looked to social media and the internet for entertainment purposes, but still relied on factory sources and family & friends for information on health and safety at work, particularly regarding Covid-19; social media was not seen as a very reliable source for important information (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Social media usage by gender

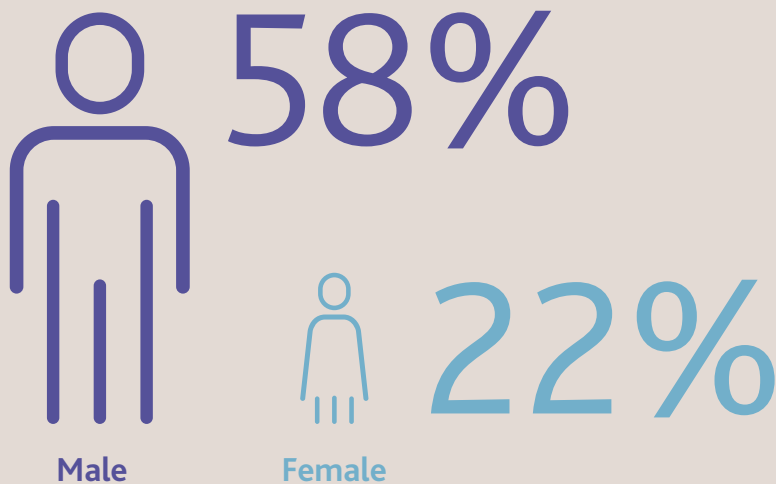
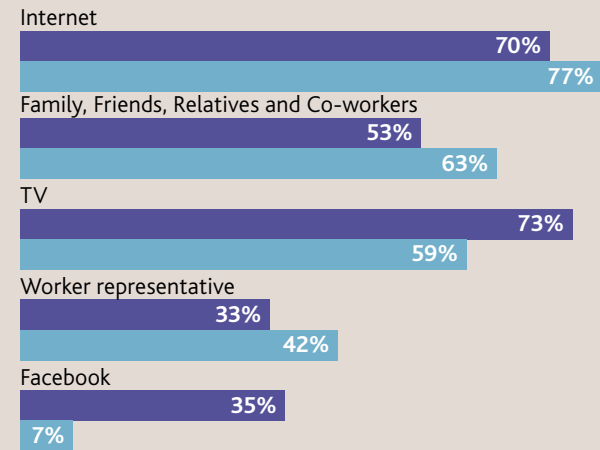
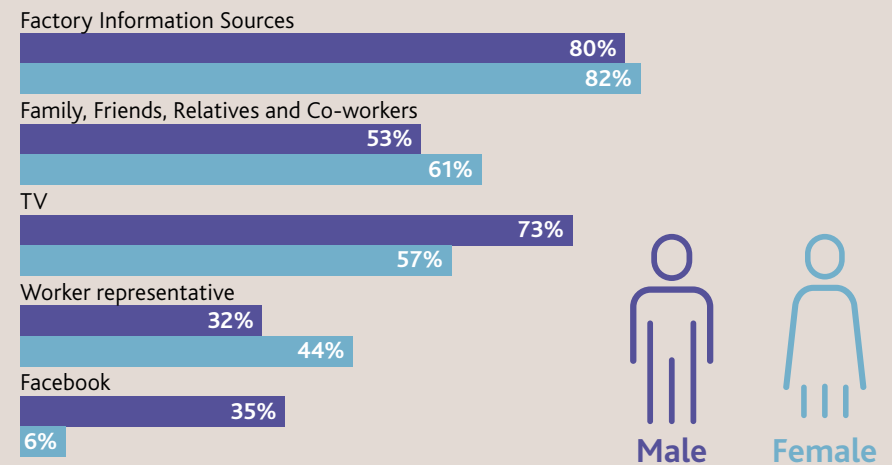


Figure 8: Sources of information regarding the pandemic situation and safety measures to protect against COVID-19

Sources of information regarding COVID-19 situation

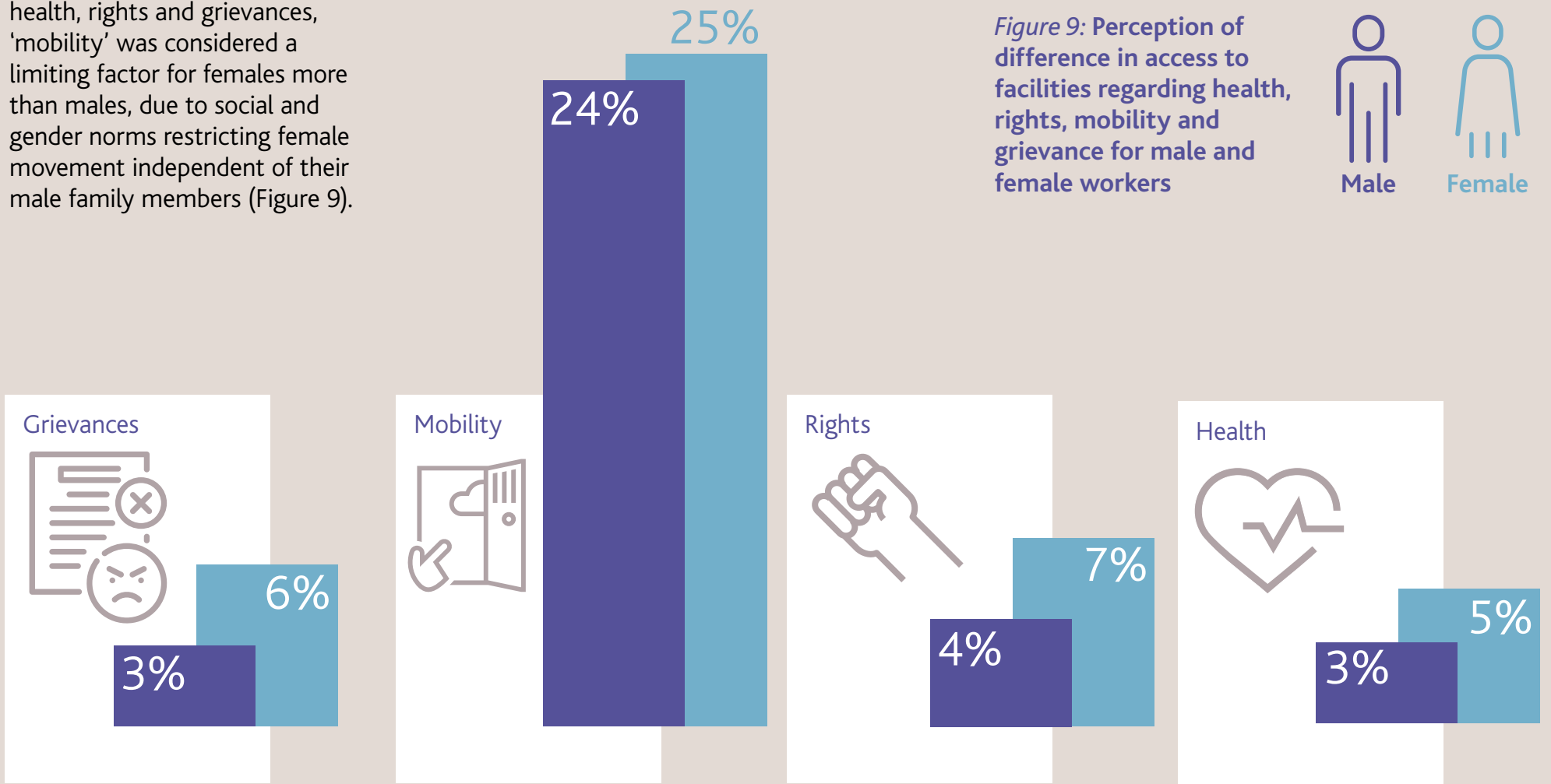


Sources of information regarding safety measures to protect against COVID-19



9.

While most workers did not report much of a disparity in access to facilities regarding health, rights and grievances, 'mobility' was considered a limiting factor for females more than males, due to social and gender norms restricting female movement independent of their male family members (Figure 9).



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the RMG workers surveyed were knowledgeable about a wide range of information sources, though uptake of those sources varied by gender and level of education.

The higher the level of education, the more regular and diverse the use of all information sources, particularly ICTs. Inversely, lower levels of education are an obstacle to women accessing and operating ICTs; and cultural gender norms hinder the ownership of smartphones, access to certain information sources, and mobility for female workers. It is interesting to note that female workers reportedly believed their male counterparts understood smartphone use and social media content better than they did, which led to less overall interest in engaging with ICTs to access information.

The confidence that workers displayed in their factories to provide reliable information about safety at work, rights, and Covid-19 demonstrates that the employer has an integral role to play in the dissemination of accurate information to RMG workers and can serve as a resource and source of support, particularly for low-income workers.

A number of suggestions for improving access to information for female RMG workers are:



Organising adequate training around smartphone and mobile banking technology in factories

Creating further opportunities for general education and literacy training for women



Establishing a special committee and information centre at factory level for female workers

Continued multi-stakeholder collaboration to promote access to information for all RMG workers



ethicaltrade.org



Supported by



Laudes ———
— Foundation

The Laudes Foundation logo consists of the text "Laudes" followed by a horizontal line, and "Foundation" below it, preceded by a horizontal line.