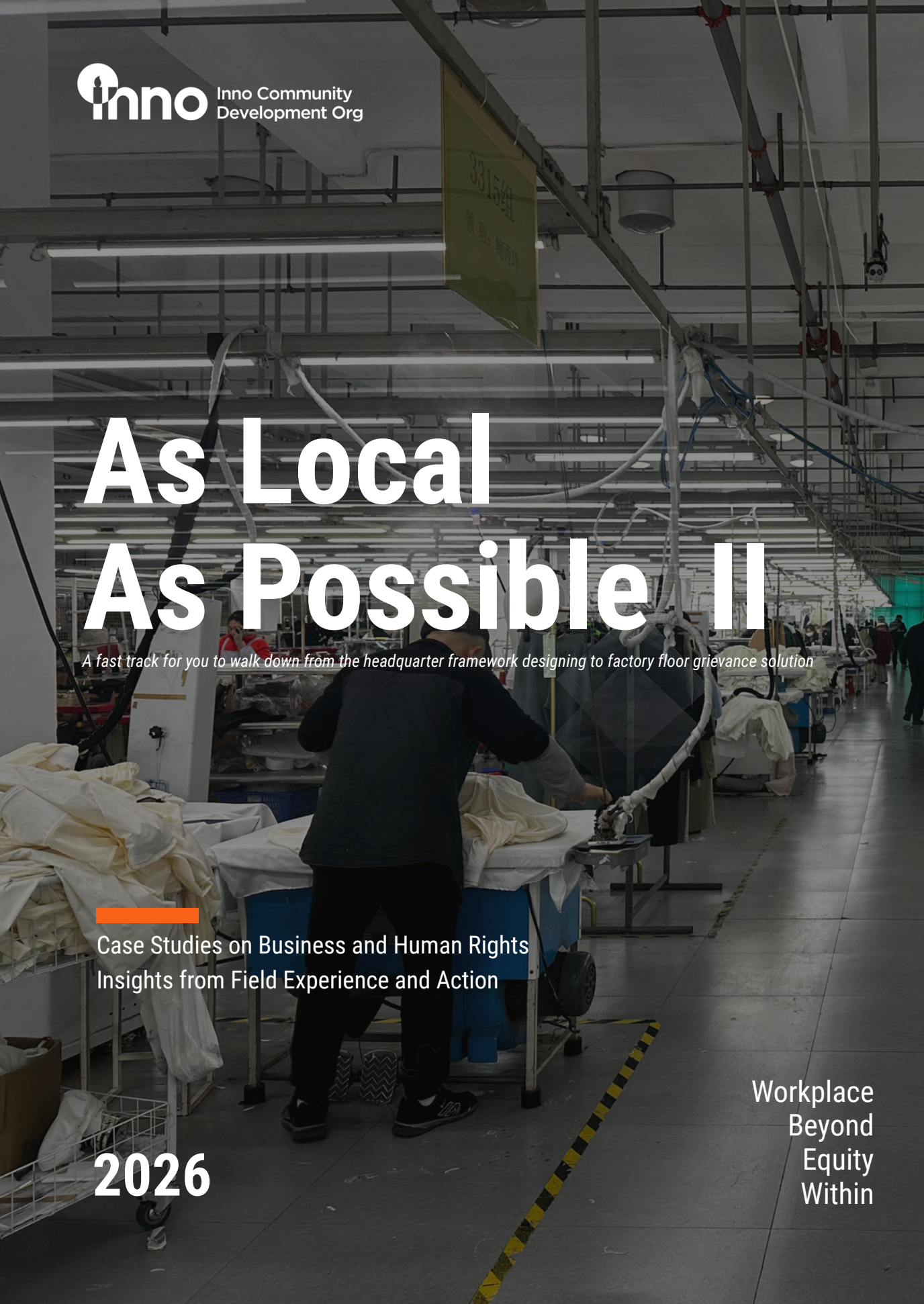


Inno Community Development Org

As Local As Possible II

A fast track for you to walk down from the headquarter framework designing to factory floor grievance solution

Case Studies on Business and Human Rights
Insights from Field Experience and Action

Workplace
Beyond
Equity
Within

2026

Inno Community Development Org

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Introduction

How Localisation Shapes Remedy



Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

> Workers are rights-holders at the centre of remedy.

The Role of Localisation

Last year, in the As Local As Possible casebook, we discussed how "on site, in the local context" can advance remedy. This year's practice has further helped us recognise that workers are rights-holders at the centre of remedy; their experiences are also an important source of knowledge for understanding local contexts and developing remedy approaches.

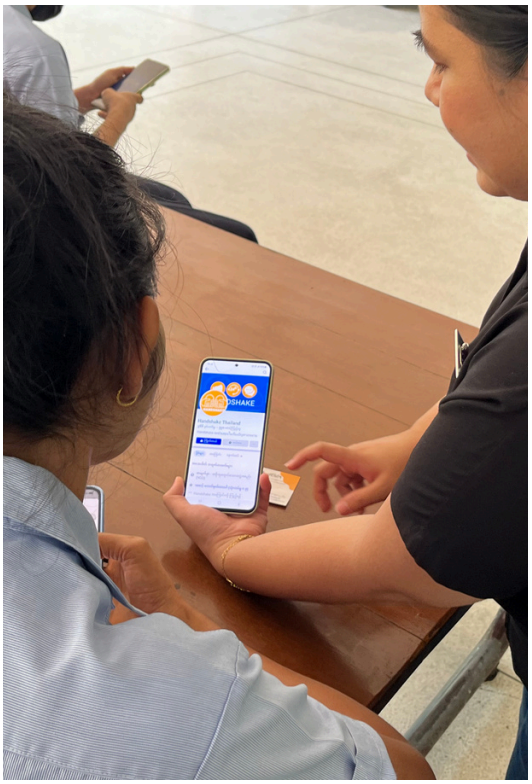
Through continued engagement with workers, the team can deepen its understanding of specific working environments and the human rights impacts within them, and adjust its assessments and actions accordingly. The value of localisation lies in how such understanding informs remedy decisions, enabling responses that address workers' actual circumstances and contribute to changing the working conditions and relationships that give rise to harm.

Inno's practice has gradually shown that understanding the social, cultural, political and institutional conditions affecting workers' lives can directly change how remedy is pursued. Workers' needs, choices and expressions are closely connected with their dependence on employment, everyday management practices and workplace power relations. By maintaining ongoing engagement with workers and understanding these contexts, the team can adjust investigation approaches, establish protective measures and identify feasible remedy pathways. The role of localisation is reflected in how this understanding shapes action. During the process, information provided by different parties and conditions observed on the ground must also be considered to clarify how each brand, supplier and factory is involved in the adverse impacts and what responsibilities each bears.

Understanding the local context includes identifying and supporting changes to practices that contribute to harm.

This casebook focuses on heat-related risks, social protection and forced labour risks. It preserves each worker's experience from raising a concern through the current stage of handling, showing how different rights issues intersect, how worker participation influences decisions, and how actions are adjusted amid challenges and constraints. Through thematic comparisons and cross-Case Discussions, we discuss what localisation contributes: which forms of understanding changed the handling process, which responsibilities have been fulfilled, and what unresolved questions remain between individual remedy and workplace improvement.

Handshake Worker's Hotline (Handshake) is a non-judicial grievance, remedy and capacity-building programme operated by Inno. All cases presented in this casebook are genuine cases received and followed up by Handshake's local teams. To protect the privacy of workers and other relevant individuals, names, factory names and other potentially identifying information have been removed or generalised.



Themes 01

Protection and Entitlements in Hot Working Conditions



Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

Thematic Introduction
The Severity and Hidden Nature of Heat Risks

Thematic Introduction

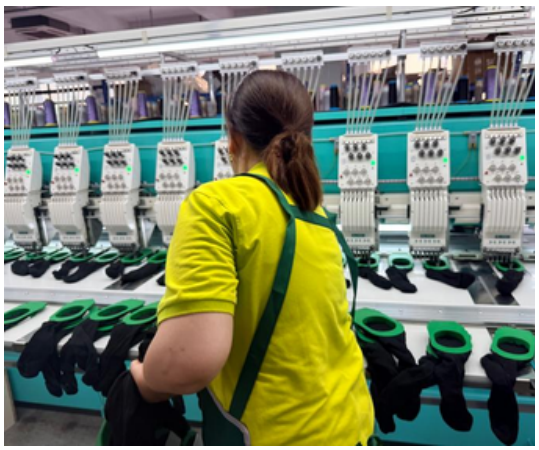
The Severity and Hidden Nature of Heat Risks

This year, Inno observed through Handshake's practice that, although heat risks have been incorporated into relevant Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) standards, proactive identification and response remain insufficient. Heat exposure concerns workers' right to work in safe and healthy conditions: seasonal changes can concentrate risks, while production conditions and work arrangements affect the duration of exposure and whether workers can access necessary protection. Inno has therefore identified heat risks as an annual priority. The Handshake team established a dedicated line for heat-related concerns and conducted rights awareness activities through locally used communication channels, bringing greater attention to occupational health and safety issues that are often overlooked.

Occupational heat exposure is characterised by multiple interacting factors and changes according to working conditions. Air temperature, humidity, radiant heat and airflow jointly affect the body's ability to dissipate heat, while metabolic heat generated through work and the clothing worn also influence the heat load on the body. Therefore, workers performing work of different intensities or wearing different clothing may face different levels of risk under the same temperature conditions, and indoor work also requires protection.[1] Heat impacts may present as acute conditions such as fatigue, fainting, heat exhaustion or heatstroke, and may also involve longer-term health impacts affecting the cardiovascular, respiratory and renal systems.[2] These characteristics require protective measures to be adjusted according to actual working conditions; occupational heat risks cannot be assessed based on temperature alone.

The seriousness of heat risks exists alongside their hidden nature. ILO research indicates that heat-related illnesses can be difficult to diagnose and report, and occupational heat exposure is not limited to periods of heatwaves.[2]

Handshake's experience in handling cases shows that the hidden nature of heat risks is also reflected in how risks become normalised in daily work: when persistent fatigue and discomfort are viewed as unavoidable burdens of production that workers must adapt to themselves, the impacts caused by working conditions may be reduced to questions of individual tolerance, while factories' responsibility to provide workplace protection may be overlooked. If risk assessments rely primarily on inspection records and reported incidents, actual exposure, physical discomfort and protection gaps that have not been recorded may remain unidentified. The absence of formal complaints does not mean that workers have received the protection they need.



Treating heat exposure only as a temporary issue during summer or heatwaves can also obscure continued exposure throughout production processes, causing attention to decline after the season ends. Factories should proactively identify and prevent heat risks and integrate them into ongoing occupational health and safety management. Grievance mechanisms should provide workers with safe and accessible channels to report their actual circumstances, allowing issues that are not identified through existing management systems to enter investigation and remedy processes.

Treating heat exposure only as a temporary issue during summer or heatwaves can also obscure continued exposure throughout production processes, causing attention to decline after the season ends.

Factories should proactively identify and prevent heat risks and integrate them into ongoing occupational health and safety management. Grievance mechanisms should provide workers with safe and accessible channels to report their actual circumstances, allowing issues that are not identified through existing management systems to enter investigation and remedy processes.Heat-related remedy involves interconnected rights claims. Insufficient protection may affect health, rest and income at the same time, while pressure after raising concerns may limit workers' participation in the handling process.

Factories need to provide workplace protection, pay amounts due and protect workers who raise grievances; brands should follow up on investigations and the implementation of remedial measures. Cooling measures should be combined with work arrangements and emergency support.[3] The role of localisation lies in ensuring that understanding of specific working environments, workplace relationships and workers' experiences informs risk assessment and remedy decisions. Whether workers can participate, and whether their feedback can influence the process, affects whether measures address actual needs.



Night Shift Heat Protection and Emergency Support

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

Thailand has a tropical climate, with hot weather throughout most of the year. March to May is generally the hottest period, with April usually the hottest month.[13] Within this climatic context, ventilation, cooling and emergency support during night shifts are important components of workers' routine occupational health and safety protection.

In April 2026, a night-shift worker at a factory in Thailand used the Handshake grievance mechanism to raise concerns regarding ventilation, cooling and emergency support in the work area. The worker reported that day-shift workers had access to air conditioning and fans, while night-shift workers did not receive equivalent ventilation and cooling support. According to the worker, working at night in these conditions caused fatigue due to heat and difficulty concentrating. The grievance record also noted reports of fainting and skin rashes among workers. These physical symptoms and the working conditions in which they occurred require investigation together.

The worker stated that the situation had continued for at least four years. Concerns had been raised internally several times, with explanations including insufficient night-shift staffing and concerns that prolonged operation of the system could damage equipment. Some workers therefore purchased small personal fans at their own expense to cope with the heat during work. The concerns raised involved actual heat exposure, differences in protection between day and night shifts, and why previous reports had failed to result in action.

The worker hoped that night-shift workers could receive effective ventilation to reduce physical discomfort and difficulties caused by heat. The grievance also clearly stated that the key need was ventilation, not necessarily air conditioning.

The factory subsequently investigated night-shift equipment operation and cooling arrangements.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) issues, specifically heat exposure control, reporting and response to physical discomfort, emergency staffing arrangements and health and safety training. Additional fans also require appropriate fan guards and electrical safety measures. Night-shift working hours, rest periods and remuneration remain Wage and Hour issues requiring further verification. The factory's protection responsibilities must cover all shifts.[11] Limited staffing, equipment operating costs or shift arrangements cannot justify workers' continued lack of necessary protection. This case requires verification of ventilation and cooling during actual night-shift operations, staffing arrangements during holiday overtime, and support for seeking assistance and medical care when workers experience discomfort. The factory should ensure that protection and emergency responsibilities are supported by available personnel and resources during night shifts; the brand should support investigation into night-shift experiences and previous complaints to determine whether the issues had been overlooked over an extended period.

The factory's explanation of the cause does not fully align with the worker's account. The factory stated that a communication lapse occurred regarding holiday night-shift overtime arrangements, resulting in the air handling unit (AHU) not being switched on, although fans in the work area remained operational. The factory further stated that the AHU would normally operate whenever night-shift production took place. The worker, however, described a longer history of insufficient ventilation and previous requests being rejected. The differing accounts regarding the scope of the shutdown and the duration of the issue require separate verification. Restoring the equipment addressed an immediate issue but did not explain how previous complaints were handled or why similar difficulties continued.

Following the complaint, the factory recorded a temperature of 28°C during a night-shift inspection and stated that no areas exceeded its internal temperature requirements. The brand nevertheless requested routine monitoring records and further asked whether previous night-shift complaints had been received and handled, as well as the number and cost of personal fans purchased by night-shift workers. The investigation therefore expanded to include daily operations, internal feedback mechanisms and burdens already borne by workers. During the investigation, questions about the source of the complaint also caused the worker concern about possible retaliation. Non-retaliation measures need to address both investigation practices and management behaviour, ensuring that workers can continue using external channels and provide information safely.



Participation and the Remediation Process

The Handshake team verified differences in equipment use between day and night shifts, workers' physical experiences and previous internal communication. The team raised verification requests with the factory and the brand. Follow-up records dated 14 April 2026 showed that ventilation had been restored, and the factory had prepared fans for night-shift workers. The factory subsequently reported that the AHU had resumed operation and that six additional fans had been installed.

According to the factory's feedback, when discussing equipment solutions with night-shift workers, some workers pointed out that the proposed wall-mounted fans could disturb paper patterns and affect their work. The factory therefore selected floor-standing fans and proposed measures including the use of fine-mesh fan guards, appropriate socket arrangements and cable management, in order to balance ventilation, production needs and electrical safety. A further four fans were still planned for procurement. The factory's facilities team was also required to clarify responsibilities for night-shift duty arrangements and equipment operation.

Emergency support during night shifts became another area of follow-up. The factory stated that supervisors had received first-aid and emergency response training, and that night-shift workers were reminded on 22 April 2026 of how to report discomfort and seek assistance. The brand further asked about the basis for allocating medical support during night shifts and how workers on smaller shifts could access assistance. On 8 May 2026, the factory reported that it was progressing arrangements for night-shift nursing services, hospital coordination and internal approval procedures.

The arrangement of nursing support also involved specific discussion and adjustment. The factory initially stated that the night-shift medical room was closed, with emergency response relying on supervisors and nearby hospitals.

It proposed arranging a nurse when the number of night-shift workers reached 200. The brand questioned how this threshold had been determined and how workers could access support when staffing levels were below this number. The factory subsequently reported that management had agreed to adjust the proposed threshold to 100 workers across all night-shift departments combined. The specific service arrangement remained subject to hospital coordination and internal approval.

After the concern was raised, the worker reported that a supervisor had asked who submitted the complaint. After confirming that they were the person who raised the issue, they were further questioned about why they had not first reported it internally and why they had informed the customer. When Handshake sought to understand the identities of relevant individuals, the worker initially requested confidentiality but later provided the supervisor's information after further communication. They also explained that they raised the issue because they were concerned about the unfair treatment experienced by colleagues. Handshake reported this situation to the brand and factory, requesting that the worker's right to choose a grievance channel be protected and continuing to follow up on the pressure the worker experienced. On 15 May 2026, the brand continued to request information on protection measures, and the factory committed to informing relevant management personnel and workers of the non-retaliation requirements.



Protection and Entitlements in Hot Working Conditions

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

During the follow-up on 11 May 2026, the worker stated that they remained on the night shift, recognised the improvements that had taken place and observed that other departments had also received additional fans. The restoration of ventilation and installation of additional equipment were supported by the worker's feedback, and the selection of additional fans addressed specific operational needs.

As of 15 May 2026, the procurement of a further four fans, night-shift nursing services and communication of non-retaliation requirements remained pending implementation or further verification. The factory reported that no cases had been identified in relevant night-shift records and noted that medical assistance had been provided in other departments. However, the timing, location and reporting process of the fainting and skin-rash incidents reported by the worker still require further verification. The subsequent records do not provide specific findings or actions regarding the supervisor's questioning of the complaint source. The costs of personal fans purchased by night-shift workers also remain to be addressed.

Case Discussion

The first challenge in this case lies in the different investigation scopes implied by the worker's long-term experience of heat exposure and the factory's explanation of a single operational omission. The worker reported years of insufficient ventilation and previous requests that did not lead to action, with some workers purchasing fans at their own expense. The factory, however, explained the issue as a communication lapse in holiday night-shift arrangements. Restoring the air handling unit addressed the immediate ventilation issue, but it did not explain why night-shift workers had not received equivalent protection previously or why internal feedback had failed to drive change.Handshake's review of differences between shifts and previous communication, together with the brand's requests for operational records, historical complaints and

and information on self-purchased fans, expanded the investigation into responsibility for routine protection and its implementation. In Thailand, where hot weather persists for most of the year, this continuity is particularly important: the difficulties faced by night-shift workers need to be incorporated into routine occupational health and safety management.

Night-shift workers' feedback that wall-mounted fans could blow paper patterns around directly influenced the choice of equipment. Workers not only raised cooling-related concerns but also used their daily operational experience to explain why a proposed solution might interfere with their work, contributing to the development of a feasible approach. Based on this feedback, the factory selected floor-standing fans and proposed arrangements for fan guards, sockets and cable management. The worker who raised the grievance subsequently recognised the improvements and observed additional equipment being installed in other departments. Here, local knowledge was reflected in workers' understanding of production processes, airflow and actual conditions of use, and this knowledge informed decisions about resources through ongoing engagement.

Emergency support revealed another set of conditions: nurse allocation involved night-shift staffing levels, on-site availability and coordination with hospitals. The brand's questions prompted the factory to adjust the proposed staffing threshold, although the service arrangement remained pending. Night shifts with fewer workers also require accessible first-aid and medical support arrangements. The factory needs to fulfil its protective responsibilities through resources that are actually available across different shifts.

The coexistence of improved protection and pressure following a grievance also demonstrates that remedy must address workplace relationships.

The supervisor's questioning about why the customer had been informed caused the worker concern about providing information about relevant individuals. Although the worker later provided the information, the investigation still needs to address concerns about subsequent workplace relationships. Assessing this pressure requires understanding the speaker's authority within the factory, the circumstances in which the questioning occurred and workers' concerns about potential consequences. Based on this situation, Handshake raised protection requirements, and the brand continued to follow up on implementation. The factory still needs to prevent management personnel from exerting pressure, so that workers can continue to express concerns and identify gaps in measures.

This case therefore connects heat exposure, resource allocation, worker participation and grievance protection: workers' operational experience changed the proposed measures, while actual improvements continued to be influenced by staffing resources and workplace relationships. Night-shift arrangements also involve occupational health and safety, Wage and Hour issues, and require attention to the burden of night work, rest, family lilife and corresponding compensation.[5]



Heat Protection and Grievance Confidentiality

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

In June 2026, a worker used the Handshake grievance mechanism to raise concerns regarding workplace heat conditions. Recalling previous working experiences, the worker described how machines generated intense heat during operation, and that even when electric fans were switched on, the air reaching workers remained hot. This working condition had continued for several years, but the worker stated that there had been no visible temperature monitoring equipment or records in the work area at the time, making it impossible to understand the level of heat exposure through workplace information.

By the time the concern was raised, the high-heat operation described above had already stopped. The worker reported that some areas in the factory still relied mainly on fans for cooling, that clear daily temperature monitoring information had not been available, and that they had not received emergency training on heat-related discomfort, fainting or similar situations. The worker knew that a first-aid kit was available on site but did not know how to use it, whom to report to when experiencing discomfort, or what support could be accessed.

The worker hoped that the factory would install monitoring equipment, implement effective cooling measures in high-heat work areas and improve relevant occupational health and safety emergency training. The worker asked Handshake to report the concern without disclosing their identity, hoping to support improvements while avoiding disclosure of their identity.

This concern had a specific background. The worker reported that previous complaints had become known to factory personnel; information about the position and work experience required for investigation could also allow individuals within the factory to identify the person who raised the concern. Handshake therefore needed to retain investigation information relating to heat sources, working conditions and protection gaps, while avoiding disclosure of departments, positions or other details that could directly identify the individual. The challenge was to enable a specific investigation while controlling the risk of identity exposure caused by investigation information.



Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) issues, specifically the monitoring and control of heat exposure, the prevention of heat-related illnesses and emergency responses to them, and health and safety information and training. Anonymous feedback and enquiries into a complainant's identity following a complaint also involve privacy and personal information protection, grievance procedures and non-retaliation requirements.[11] The worker's experience of heat, working conditions and gaps in emergency response knowledge provided important leads for the investigation. However, specific job roles, work areas and previous work experiences could also enable individuals within the factory to identify the worker. If an investigation begins by seeking to identify the person who raised the concern, it may increase pressure on the worker and affect their willingness to continue providing information. The investigation therefore needs to verify actual working conditions and protection arrangements while controlling the disclosure of personal information, ensuring that workers do not have to expose their identity in order to seek improvements to working conditions.

The investigation results provided by the brand to Handshake recorded the availability of some temperature and humidity meters, monitoring records and public first-aid kits, while also identifying that monitoring did not cover all relevant work areas and that some supplies were missing. The factory had not conducted a heat stress assessment, developed mitigation measures or provided relevant training. These gaps directly affected whether workers received effective protection. The factory's responsibilities include identifying actual heat exposure, implementing cooling and work-rest measures based on risks, and ensuring that workers can access assistance when experiencing discomfort. Equipment provision should serve these protection requirements.

The factory needs to verify risks and take action through workplace inspections, equipment operation records and training records, while avoiding turning the investigation into an attempt to identify the source of the complaint. When supporting supply chain investigations, the brand should include confidentiality and protection from retaliation as investigation requirements and prevent investigators from seeking to identify complainants. Handshake needs to clarify with workers what information can be shared, avoid sharing details that could directly identify individuals, and continue to understand how the investigation affects their circumstances at work. Improving protection measures and protecting grievance participation are responsibilities that must be addressed together; equipment improvements cannot replace the need to ensure that workers can safely raise concerns.



Protection and Entitlements
in Hot Working Conditions

The supervisor's questioning about why the customer had been informed caused the worker concern about providing information about relevant individuals. Although the worker later provided the information, the investigation still needs to address concerns about subsequent workplace relationships. Assessing this pressure requires understanding the speaker's authority within the factory, the circumstances in which the questioning occurred and workers' concerns about potential consequences. Based on this situation, Handshake raised protection requirements, and the brand continued to follow up on implementation. The factory still needs to prevent management personnel from exerting pressure, so that workers can continue to express concerns and identify gaps in measures.

This case therefore connects heat exposure, resource allocation, worker participation and grievance protection: workers' operational experience changed the proposed measures, while actual improvements continued to be influenced by staffing resources and workplace relationships. Night-shift arrangements also involve occupational health and safety, Wage and Hour issues, and require attention to the burden of night work, rest, family lilife and corresponding compensation.[5]

Participation and the Remediation Process

The Handshake team first verified the worker's previous work conditions and current work arrangements, identifying which job roles and workplace information could allow factory personnel to infer the worker's identity. The team made clear that the specific work area would not be disclosed. The team then organised the feedback into investigation areas including workplace temperature monitoring, cooling measures and emergency training.In accordance with the worker's anonymity request, Handshake reported the protection concerns to the brand and requested that investigation and improvements be advanced. On 30 June 2026, the brand confirmed that it had initiated an investigation.

After the investigation began, Handshake proactively asked during follow-up on cooling measures whether anyone within the factory had attempted to identify the complainant indirectly or exert pressure on the worker. The worker subsequently reported that a factory manager had asked whether they were the person who submitted the complaint, and that another individual, whom the worker described as "the person conducting the audit", had also made indirect enquiries. Handshake reiterated the confidentiality arrangement and reminded the worker to pay attention to personal safety. This follow-up identified that identity risks remained after anonymous feedback had been provided. Existing records do not show that further action was taken to require relevant parties to adjust investigation methods or implement additional protection measures in response to these enquiries.

At the beginning of July, an on-site review by the supplier representative and feedback from the brand further identified areas requiring improvement, including monitoring coverage, risk assessment, protective measures and training. Based on these findings, the factory proposed installing additional thermometers, continuously recording and analysing temperatures, adding fans in areas with more pronounced sources of heat, and improving first-aid supplies, rest arrangements and emergency training.

After the factory proposed these arrangements, Handshake shared the measures with the worker and continued to follow up on implementation. On 4 July 2026, fans had been added in some work areas, and cooling equipment had also been installed in warehouse areas. The follow-up on 13 July 2026 continued to refer to these arrangements. From the initial concern raised, through investigation and factory actions, some protection gaps received specific responses, while other management arrangements still require continued follow-up.


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*The factory's subsequent document outlining corrective measures for high-temperature prevention.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

As of 13 July 2026, some cooling equipment had been installed. However, further information was still required regarding continuous temperature monitoring, heat stress assessment, rest arrangements and comprehensive training. The actual cooling effect after additional equipment was installed also requires further review under different weather conditions and working circumstances.

Anonymous feedback enabled the protection concerns to enter the investigation process, but the worker continued to report enquiries into the source of the complaint. Existing materials do not show that further action was taken to address this risk. Therefore, the implementation of equipment improvements and whether workers can continue working and providing feedback with confidence require separate follow-up.

Case Discussion

The anonymity requirement directly influenced the investigation approach in this case. The worker's previous complaint experience, job role and work area arrangements meant that some details of the work situation could serve as identifying information. After verification with the worker, Handshake agreed not to disclose the specific work area while retaining investigation issues including temperature monitoring, cooling measures and emergency training. This arrangement relied on an understanding of workplace relationships and the division of responsibilities within the factory: which information could expose an individual, and which information was sufficient for the factory to investigate protection gaps, needed to be assessed through ongoing engagement with the worker.

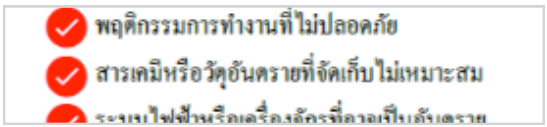
The worker's experience also shifted the investigation from whether equipment existed to whether protection covered actual working conditions. The investigation further identified gaps in monitoring coverage, heat stress assessment and training. Following feedback and investigation, the worker confirmed that some fans and cooling equipment had been installed. The improvements

resulted from the influence of worker experience on the scope of investigation, as well as the brand's efforts to advance the investigation and the factory's allocation of resources and implementation of measures. During this process, the worker not only raised rights-related concerns but also used daily work experience to assess whether proposed measures were effective.

The subsequent enquiries into the worker's identity demonstrated that protection improvements and grievance protection must progress together. Even where identifying information is controlled during feedback, management personnel may still identify a complainant through further questioning and existing workplace relationships. Handshake's continued engagement identified this pressure and also revealed limitations in the confidentiality arrangements applied in this case. Whether the factory stops tracing complaints and exerting pressure, the brand follows up on investigation practices, and Handshake supports safe feedback all affect whether workers can continue to assert their occupational health and safety rights while remaining in employment.

Starting from High-Temperature Allowance Concerns

Workers facing similar situations of heat exposure and lack of high-temperature allowance may have different experiences in raising entitlement-related concerns, expectations for change and conditions for participation. The following two cases both began with requests for high-temperature allowance, but they present different issues: how workers assessed their current working conditions, how historical entitlements were examined, and how the relationship between protection improvements and wage-related entitlements continues to require attention.



*The factory's subsequent document outlining corrective measures for high-temperature prevention.

Protection and Entitlements
in Hot Working Conditions

Heat Protection and Allowance in the Heat-Setting Workshop

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

The Handshake team conducts regular in-person thematic training sessions at partner factories to introduce workers to the use of the grievance mechanism and visits workshops to understand actual working conditions. In July 2026, during a training session at a partner factory in China, the team identified high-temperature conditions in the heat-setting workshop and continued communicating with workers after the training. One worker reported that the workshop had more than 30 workers and five heat-setting machines. The reported machine operating temperature exceeded 127°C; this figure referred to the machine temperature reported by the worker, and there was no monitoring information available in the workshop for workers to understand the ambient temperature at that time. According to the worker, water-curtain cooling systems only covered three of the machines, while the other two machines mainly relied on fans for cooling.

The worker described being "too hot to have the strength to speak", sweating heavily every day and having "salt particles on my hands and legs, drinking water until I felt nauseous". During follow-up communication, the worker stated: "After being exposed to heat for so long, I do not feel much anymore, but it is still hot." The worker reported that the heat-setting workshop was the only area in the factory without air conditioning, that no routine temperature measurement or records had been seen, and that they had never received a high-temperature allowance. When asked about supplies for protection against heat, the worker only mentioned Huoxiang Zhengqi oral liquid (a ready-made oral traditional Chinese medicine commonly stocked in China for use during hot weather).

When discussing what changes were expected, the worker stated: "The working environment cannot be changed anymore; I just hope we can receive some high-temperature allowance."

The continued discomfort and the worker's assessment of the possibility of change led the initial request to focus on allowance. The worker chose to provide feedback anonymously and reiterated the confidentiality requirement during subsequent communication.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns high-temperature allowance under Wage and Hour, as well as Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) issues including heat exposure control, cooling coverage, temperature monitoring, emergency support when workers experience discomfort, and health and safety training. Anonymous feedback also involves personal information protection and grievance protection. The worker raised high-temperature allowance as the primary concern while also providing specific indications of insufficient protection. The factory needs to address wage-related entitlements while also improving the working conditions that contributed to physical discomfort.

The presence of fans and water-curtain cooling systems does not mean that every worker has received effective protection. The report that only three out of five machines were covered by water-curtain cooling systems requires investigation into equipment locations, airflow and actual work areas. Regarding workers' reported discomfort, including heavy sweating, weakness and nausea, the factory should understand the conditions under which these symptoms occurred and provide necessary rest, reporting channels and support. The brand should follow up on investigation and corrective actions for these specific issues, rather than concluding the assessment based only on a single visit where conditions appeared comfortable.

The handling of high-temperature allowance requires clarification of applicable positions, relevant periods and the basis for assessment. Local high-temperature allowance requirements specify that drinks provided to prevent heat-related illness and essential medicines cannot replace high-temperature allowance payments.[15] Adding equipment, distributing supplies and establishing procedures each address different requirements. For previous claims of unpaid high-temperature allowance, the factory still needs to provide an evidence-based response. Monitoring should cover actual working conditions, and records after improvements should be used to understand current conditions; previous working experiences and entitlement claims also require corresponding verification.

Participation and the Remediation Process

On 27 July 2026, during follow-up after the training session, the Handshake team continued assessing the actual cooling effectiveness based on observations of high-powered fans and exhaust fans during the factory visit. The team learned that water-curtain cooling systems only covered some machines. The worker reported that there was no equipment available to measure room temperature and continued to experience sweating, weakness and nausea. Handshake reminded the worker to rest, report discomfort to management and seek assistance when needed, confirmed the worker's high-temperature allowance concern and anonymity preference, and reported issues regarding protection coverage, monitoring and entitlements to the brand.

On 28 July 2026, the worker reported that the factory had added one high-powered industrial fan for each machine in addition to the existing equipment and had arranged for supplies for protection against heat to be distributed every afternoon from July to October. When asked to further identify high-heat workstations, the worker explained that there was no clear distinction between positions and hoped that everyone working near the same machine could receive cooling equipment coverage. The worker also mentioned seeing someone operating temperature measurement equipment, and Handshake continued to verify whether monitoring had been established and whether actual improvements had occurred.

On 29 July 2026, the brand responded that an investigation had been initiated and explained that

during a previous site visit, the cooling facilities and overall temperature had appeared relatively comfortable. The brand requested further information on the locations of specific high-heat workstations. Handshake shared the worker's explanation that cooling coverage should extend across the entire production line, while also highlighting that the worker had previously been unable to understand workplace conditions through monitoring data and was unclear whether the position had been assessed for high-temperature allowance eligibility. Based on this, the team requested verification of monitoring data after the installation of additional fans, clarification of position assessments and high-temperature allowance rules, and a response to the worker's entitlement concerns. On 31 July 2026, the worker again requested anonymity, and Handshake reiterated that the worker's personal information would not be disclosed.

On 14 August 2026, the brand reported that the factory had adjusted the positioning of cooling equipment. Supplier representatives and management personnel interviewed workers at each machine, and those interviewed considered that additional equipment was no longer required at that time. The brand also reported that the factory previously had no environmental temperature and humidity measuring instruments or daily records. The factory had since installed temperature and humidity meters at both ends of the workshop and established daily monitoring records. According to the brand's account, supplier representatives measured the overall workshop temperature at 27–29°C on both 29 July and 30 July 2026. The factory also developed and posted a policy on high-temperature allowances and measures to prevent heat-related harm, and conducted relevant training.



*High-temperature emergency medical kits subsequently supplied by the factory.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

During the follow-up on 14 August 2026, Handshake explained the equipment adjustments, monitoring arrangements and policy measures to the worker item by item. The worker confirmed that the cooling equipment and temperature conditions were "acceptable" and expressed satisfaction with the improvements. Handshake subsequently closed the case. The worker's feedback indicates that the improvements in protection had resulted in tangible changes in their experience; the implementation of relevant policies and training had also been reported by the brand.

The records do not specify whether high-temperature allowance was paid to the worker, nor do they separately provide the assessment results regarding whether allowance should have been paid for the previous working period. The temperature measurements taken over two days after the installation of additional equipment reflect improved conditions, but how the original entitlement concern will ultimately be addressed remains an issue requiring further attention.

Case Discussion

The worker initially focused only on obtaining high-temperature allowance, which was related to the worker's belief that the working environment could not be changed. This assessment demonstrates that the way workers express their concerns is influenced by their understanding of the conditions they face. Through continued communication, specific difficulties, including incomplete coverage of water-curtain cooling systems and the lack of access to workplace temperature information, entered the investigation. The scope of remedy therefore expanded to include equipment positioning, monitoring and workplace procedures. The worker's confirmation of improved protection demonstrates a process in which limited initial expectations were followed by changes to actual working conditions.

Regular training, workplace visits and follow-up communication enabled the team to identify issues in daily operations and continue verification.

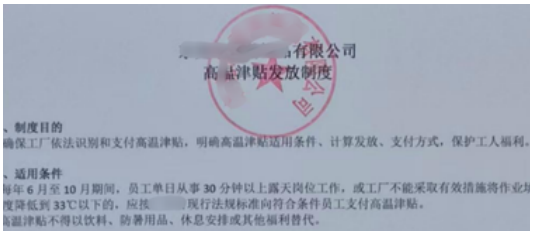
During the initial visit, the brand considered conditions relatively comfortable, while workers with long-term experience in the workshop identified differences in protection between machines. The worker's explanation that "everyone working near the same machine should be covered" shifted the investigation from identifying a single high-heat workstation to considering cooling coverage across the entire production line. Workers' daily operational experience therefore influenced the scope of investigation and the selection of measures, meaning that an individual concern also involved protection for other workers.

Although the worker recognised improvements in protection, the high-temperature allowance claim still requires a clear response. Positive feedback indicates that the worker recognised the changes that had already occurred, while wage-related entitlements still require a response based on the relevant positions and periods involved. Addressing these two aspects separately is necessary to ensure that an investigation initiated by a high-temperature allowance concern both improves working conditions and responds to the original rights claim.

Pursuing high-temperature allowance claims

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

At the factory described in "Heat protection and grievance confidentiality", another worker used the grievance mechanism to report that the factory had never provided high-temperature allowance and that no such item appeared on their wage statement. The worker recalled that when working in an environment where equipment generated significant heat, they were not aware that they could raise a claim for high-temperature allowance. By the time the worker learned about the relevant requirements through Handshake's heat-related rights awareness materials, the previous work arrangement had stopped and some production areas had been equipped with air conditioning.


有限公司
高温津贴发放制度
一、制度目的
确保工厂依法识别和支付高温津贴，明确高温津贴适用条件、计算发放、支付方式，保护工人福利。
二、适用条件
每年6月至10月期间，员工单日从事30分钟以上露天岗位工作，或工厂不能采取有效措施将作业场
度降低到33℃以下的，应按 现行法规标准向符合条件员工支付高温津贴。
高温津贴不得以饮料、防暑用品、休息安排或其他福利替代。

*The factory's subsequent policy document regarding the issuance of high-temperature allowances.

The worker hoped to seek the allowance for previous periods of work, while also worrying that changes in current working conditions might make it more difficult to obtain the allowance.

The worker's daily work was not fixed in a single location. According to the worker, they were sometimes assigned to different floors and areas and sometimes participated in outdoor loading and unloading work, with container loading potentially continuing until midday. Some work areas still mainly relied on fans for cooling. Therefore, verification needs to focus on the actual tasks performed by the worker and the conditions under which the work was carried out, rather than only the worker's usual position or current work area.

The worker hoped that the factory would clarify high-temperature allowance requirements within its wage system and pay eligible workers accordingly. For previous work periods, the worker also hoped to understand whether back payment could be provided.

Reviewing individual historical entitlements involved another consideration: verifying previous working conditions required further information about specific work periods and job experiences, which could potentially reveal the worker's identity. Handshake informed the worker that, if they wished to pursue their own historical allowance claim, personal information would need to be provided for follow-up. Alternatively, the worker could first provide anonymous feedback regarding possible gaps in the system and non-payment of allowances, and decide whether to pursue an individual claim further based on the investigation results. The worker chose the latter approach. The concern was therefore addressed in stages, while verification of the worker's individual historical entitlement remained subject to further communication.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Wage and Hour issues and Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) issues, specifically the payment of high-temperature allowance, communication of entitlement rules, heat exposure monitoring and workplace protection measures. The review of individual historical entitlements also involves privacy and personal information protection: it requires agreement with the worker on what information should be disclosed and to whom, while balancing verification needs with anonymity requirements. The worker had previously worked in hotter conditions without knowing about the high-temperature allowance or its applicable conditions. After raising the concern, the worker also needed to consider job classification, verification of historical periods and disclosure of personal information. Whether the issue can be advanced depends not only on how rules are implemented, but also on the conditions under which the worker is able to participate in the process.

The worker's report led the Handshake team to identify that previous high-heat work and current temporary outdoor loading and unloading tasks might involve unpaid high-temperature allowance. The absence of relevant provisions in the wage system, together with the report that allowance had never been paid in the past, also indicated that the issue could affect multiple workers. The team therefore treated the case as a high-risk wage and entitlement issue and requested further investigation by relevant parties into the applicable rules, actual work conditions, payment records and workers' understanding of entitlement requirements.

This case occurred in a province in southern China. The local climate is hot and humid, with a rainy and hot season occurring at the same time. Summer generally lasts for more than half of the year, with daily summer temperatures typically ranging from 26°C to 33°C. The number of high-temperature days is significant, and extreme heat events are becoming more frequent.[14]

This geographical context makes outdoor loading and unloading, factory ventilation and heat generated by equipment important factors in understanding actual heat exposure. Local requirements provide for high-temperature allowance for outdoor work during specified months and for workplaces where temperatures cannot be effectively reduced below the required level. Therefore, verification must consider actual working conditions and cannot rely only on general assumptions based on a worker's usual indoor position, the installation of air conditioning or a single temperature reading.[4]
The factory needs to verify actual working conditions across different areas and temporary loading and unloading tasks and clarify high-temperature allowance rules, eligible workers and applicable payment periods. The brand should require the supplier and factory to review the working periods raised by the worker and historical high-temperature allowance claims. For individual entitlement claims, Handshake also needs to discuss with the worker the required information and scope of disclosure. The worker's decision to first raise the common issue anonymously means that the current priority is to advance a review of the system, while verification of individual historical entitlements requires separate discussion.

Participation and the Remediation Process

The Handshake team selected communication channels based on the local social media environment, using livestreams, short videos and social media posts to conduct labour rights awareness activities, while selecting content based on rights issues arising in local workplaces. The heat-related rights awareness content enabled this worker to learn about high-temperature allowance requirements and connect them with their own experiences, leading them to raise an entitlement concern. After receiving the worker's request and conducting an initial risk assessment, Handshake reported the issue to the brand in accordance with the worker's anonymity request, requesting an investigation into the extent of the problem and corresponding remedial action. The brand subsequently requested the supplier and factory to

conduct an investigation, and supplier representatives conducted an on-site review. On 6 July 2026, the brand reported that the investigation found that the factory's current wage system did not include high-temperature allowance provisions and that no allowance had previously been paid. Through interviews with management and workers, the investigation also identified work arrangements and the fact that several interviewed workers were not aware of the concept of high-temperature allowance or payment criteria.

During the on-site review, supplier representatives conducted temperature measurements; however, the records also indicated that container loading operations were not taking place during the measurement period. The worker reported that loading could continue until midday, while the factory's investigation response stated that loading was usually arranged in the morning and had occasionally been moved to the afternoon due to transport delays. The measurements taken on the inspection day therefore did not cover these actual loading conditions.

The factory subsequently proposed recording temperatures continuously for 15 days after implementing and adding cooling measures, identifying positions that met high-temperature allowance criteria and explaining the relevant concepts and payment standards. This plan focused on improved working conditions after the measures were introduced. The worker's previous work areas, working periods and how corresponding entitlements should be addressed still require further investigation.

Handshake shared the investigation results and the proposed plan with the worker. During follow-up on 28 July 2026, the worker had participated in training on the use of medicines provided for hot weather and had seen newly purchased thermometers and cooling equipment. However, the worker had not seen temperature records in the areas accessible to them. Regarding the high-temperature allowance



explanation provided by the supplier representative, the worker understood that the allowance would only be calculated from the following year and would apply only to outdoor loading and unloading workers, and questioned why the current year's entitlement was not being addressed.

On 30 July 2026, Handshake again reported the issues regarding temperature records and high-temperature allowance explanations to the brand and requested further verification. The follow-up showed that, although some protection measures had been implemented, the worker still did not understand how the current year's allowance would be handled. Subsequent communication therefore continued to clarify temperature monitoring implementation, eligibility scope and the effective date of payment rules, while retaining the unresolved entitlement concern within the remedy process.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

As of 30 July 2026, progress had been made on additional cooling equipment and some training, but there was still no outcome regarding payment of high-temperature allowance. Based on the worker's understanding of the explanation provided by the supplier representative, the allowance would begin from the following year and would only apply to outdoor loading and unloading workers. The worker therefore continued to ask why the current year's allowance was not being addressed and whether previous entitlements could be paid retroactively. These questions remain subject to responses from the brand and factory.

This case demonstrates a difference between the progress of workplace improvements and the handling of entitlement issues: protection measures had begun to be implemented, but the high-temperature allowance claim had not yet reached a clear outcome.



*We use local social media in China to share short educational videos about high-temperature safety with fellow workers.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

This entitlement concern was directly connected to local rights awareness activities. Through locally used social media channels, Handshake shared information on heat-related rights, enabling workers to connect previous work experiences with high-temperature allowance requirements. The team subsequently assessed the report that high-temperature allowance had "never been paid and was not included in wages" as a potential entitlement issue affecting multiple workers, and pressed the brand and factory to investigate. The investigation found that the wage system did not contain high-temperature allowance provisions and that several interviewed workers were also unaware of payment requirements. Rights awareness therefore supported a specific rights claim, while grievance handling further examined the factory's high-temperature allowance system and payment responsibilities and required the brand to follow up on investigation and remedy.

The challenge in this case lies in the fact that entitlement verification and workplace improvements related to different time periods. The worker raised previous experiences of heat exposure, but some work activities had stopped and cooling conditions had changed by the time of investigation. The worker's questions regarding loading periods and temperature records required the team to continue verifying whether measurements reflected actual working conditions and what experiences and records should be used to assess historical entitlements. Assessing entitlements based only on existing equipment and post-improvement temperature measurements could overlook previous impacts. Occupational health and safety measures and wage-related entitlements need to be addressed separately; installing equipment cannot replace verification of whether allowances are owed and whether back payment is required.

The worker's decision to first raise the common issue anonymously also changed the order of handling. Handshake first advanced an investigation into the broader issue of unpaid allowances while preserving the worker's individual historical entitlement concern. Subsequent explanations of the allowance rules did not resolve the worker's questions regarding the current year's and historical allowances, so the team reported the concerns to the brand again. The practical role of continued engagement was to allow the supplier's explanation of allowance arrangements and the factory's investigation responses to be tested against workers' actual work experiences, while keeping outstanding entitlement claims within the scope of remedy.

Comparison of Two Cases

High-Temperature Allowance Claims and Remedy Choices

Both workers requested high-temperature allowance, but the circumstances that shaped their claims were different. The heat-setting workshop worker continued to experience significant heat-related discomfort and, believing that the working environment was difficult to change, focused their expectations on receiving high-temperature allowance. The worker pursuing historical allowance claims, however, became aware of entitlement requirements through local rights awareness activities and hoped that the factory would clarify payment rules and review previous working periods. The former reflected an assessment of the current circumstances and the possibility of change, while the latter involved a renewed understanding of rights and past experiences. These differences influenced which issues required priority attention during the investigation.

Anonymity was a shared condition for participation in both cases, but it resulted in different approaches to handling. In the heat-setting workshop case, the investigation progressed through understanding the number of machines, coverage of water-curtain cooling systems and the shared needs of workers on the same production line, while the worker repeatedly requested confidentiality. The historical allowance case involved individual past entitlements, requiring verification of specific positions and periods. The worker therefore chose to first use anonymous feedback to advance investigation of common rules before deciding whether to pursue an individual claim. The concerns raised, evidence required and risks of identity exposure were interconnected, and the remedy approach needed to be adjusted according to these conditions.

Both cases saw progress in protection measures, but the handling of entitlement issues did not reach equally clear outcomes. The heat-setting workshop worker recognised improvements in cooling measures, and the factory established relevant procedures, although records did not specify high-temperature allowance payments. The worker pursuing historical allowance claims continued to ask why, as they understood the explanation, payment would begin only the following year and apply only to outdoor loading and unloading workers, and how previous allowance claims would be addressed. Whether a worker continues to raise questions cannot replace a response to the entitlement claim itself. The comparison demonstrates the importance of understanding workers' circumstances from their initial concerns, allowing their experiences to influence investigation and solutions, while addressing protection measures and wage-related entitlements separately.

注塑车间新增风扇



*Newly installed cooling fans in the workshop where the workers are based.

Comparative Summary

On-The-Ground Assessment and Remedy Choices

The three areas of focus — night shifts, protection measures and high-temperature allowance — demonstrate different approaches to handling and remedy. In the night-shift case, understanding work processes and shift arrangements influenced equipment and emergency support decisions. In the protection case, decisions about workplace details affected how anonymous investigation could be conducted. In the two high-temperature allowance cases, workers' assessments of whether working conditions could change, their understanding of entitlements gained through rights awareness, and their need to review historical periods each influenced their concerns and remedy pathways. The same heat-related issue requires responses based on workers' actual experiences and choices.

Aspect	Night Shift Ventilation and Emergency Support	Heat Stress Relief	Allowance
Rights and Responsibilities	EHS: Ensure ventilation, cooling and emergency support for night shifts; additional equipment must meet safety requirements. Night-shift working hours, rest periods and remuneration require further verification.	EHS: Monitor heat exposure, implement protection measures, emergency response and training; protect personal information and safe grievance participation.	Wage and Hour, EHS: Address high-temperature allowance and protection measures separately; protect anonymous participation.
Specific Impact of Worker Participation	The worker raised concerns for colleagues; night-shift workers' operational feedback influenced fan selection; pressure after the complaint prompted protection requirements.	The anonymity requirement and work history affected the selection of information shared through feedback.	The heat-setting workshop worker requested cooling coverage for the whole production line; the worker pursuing past allowances chose to raise the policy issue anonymously before pursuing an individual claim.
Localised Approaches	Combined shift patterns, work processes and staffing arrangements to advance equipment allocation and follow up on daily workplace pressure.	Used understanding of workplace relationships to control identity-related information and followed up on the impact of investigation on workers' ongoing employment circumstances.	Compared cooling coverage with work processes; combined local rights awareness, changes in work arrangements and system review to assess entitlement issues.

Aspect	Night Shift Ventilation and Emergency Support	Heat Stress Relief	Allowance
Changes Reported	Ventilation restored and fans added; the worker recognised the improvements.	Some cooling equipment has been installed.	The heat-setting workshop worker recognised improvements in cooling, and the brand reported the establishment of relevant procedures. The historical allowance case has made progress on protection measures and training. No clear record of high-temperature allowance payments exists in either case.
Outstanding Issues	Nursing arrangements, additional equipment, costs of self-purchased fans and pressure following the complaint.	Ongoing monitoring, assessment, effectiveness of protection measures and enquiries into worker identity.	The heat-setting workshop case requires a response regarding historical entitlement periods; the historical allowance case requires clarification of eligibility scope, current-year and historical allowances, and individual claims.

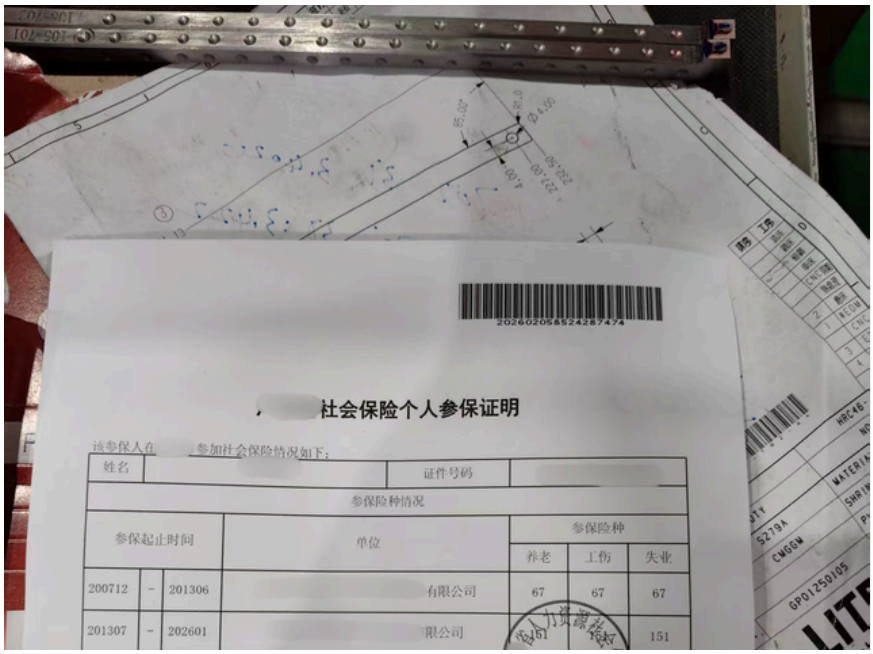
The night-shift case highlights how shift arrangements, work processes and available resources influence the effectiveness of protection measures. The heat protection case and the two high-temperature allowance cases further reveal different challenges related to anonymous investigations, cooling coverage and the review of historical entitlements. Knowledge provided by workers can bring issues that were not identified during a single site visit into the investigation process, and can also generate further questions regarding records after improvements have been made. Remedy requires both assessing whether current protection measures are effective and addressing the human rights impacts that have already occurred and the remedies that workers have not yet received.

Understanding the local context also affects how pressure following a grievance is identified. Questions such as “Who raised this?” or “Why did you inform the customer?” may carry different implications depending on the speaker’s authority, communication practices, previous workplace relationships and the worker’s assessment of potential consequences. These situations require engagement to understand whether such actions restrict continued expression of concerns and require relevant parties to address both the conduct and its impacts. A confidentiality commitment or statement prohibiting retaliation alone is not sufficient to determine whether workers can continue working with confidence.

Protection measures, entitlements and grievance protection require separate follow-up. Additional facilities may improve certain working conditions, but they do not automatically address historical entitlements or remove pressure experienced after raising a complaint. The focus of comparison is how different concerns enter the remedy process, the extent to which responsibilities have been fulfilled, and why gaps remain.

Themes 02

Social Security for Sickness and Job Separation



*Proof of social security enrollment from a factory in China; workers typically send this to us so we can verify whether contributions have been made continuously and in full.

Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

Thematic Introduction
Why social protection is difficult to comply?

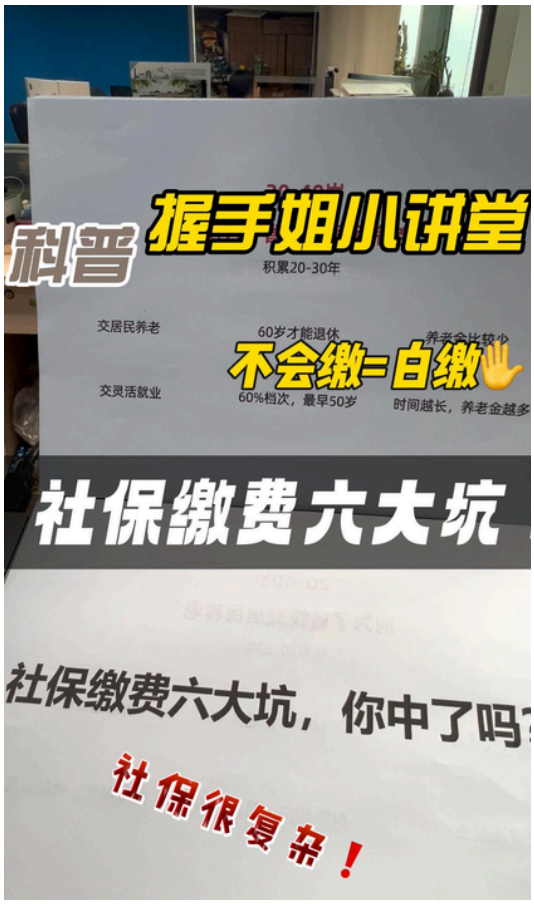
Thematic Introduction

Why Social Protection Is Difficult to Comply

Social protection concerns workers' right to maintain a basic standard of living in the face of illness, unemployment and other life risks. Handshake's case experience has drawn attention to why protection claims can remain difficult to comply when workers actually need them: factories may transfer their employer obligations for contributions through internal rules, changes in employment relationships may make it more difficult to identify responsibility for unpaid contributions, and administrative delays may prevent workers from accessing benefits. The ILO's analysis of social protection distinguishes between coverage under schemes, effective coverage and adequacy of benefits, highlighting the importance of whether protection can function when people need it.[6] This section focuses on social insurance and examines how rights claims are affected by employment relationships and implementation conditions.

Social insurance issues are closely connected with health, income and employment security. Workers may seek to require factories to fulfil social insurance obligations while also relying on their current employment for their livelihoods. Health conditions and family needs may also affect when they choose to raise concerns and participate in the handling process. These constraints may influence the choice of remedy pathways, but they do not reduce factories' responsibilities for registration and contributions. Grievance mechanisms need to understand what forms of protection workers seek, what difficulties they face in participating in the process, and reduce these burdens through appropriate communication, protection and support, enabling workers to participate in remedy decisions.

The administration of social protection, allocation of responsibilities and actual level of protection vary across countries. Understanding these systems also requires understanding their significance in local lives: how workers perceive pension, illness and unemployment protection, how changes in systems affect their expectations, and what forms of support families rely on. The Local Resources Network (LRN) and local teams need to apply this understanding to communication, investigation and remedy choices through continued engagement and accumulated experience. Cross-border collaboration cannot be achieved through simply translating legal provisions or applying another country's experience. Knowledge of local systems helps teams clarify specific obligations, available procedures and protection gaps requiring further attention. Where non-judicial mechanisms cannot directly address an issue, workers should be informed of available next steps, while unresolved remedy claims should be preserved.



*We use Chinese social media to publish short, educational videos about social security.

Shifting Employer Social Security Costs Onto Workers Who Take Leave

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests and Remedy Choices

This case concerns Social Security and Wage and Hour issues, specifically the factory's responsibility for social insurance contribIn August 2026, a worker who was already enrolled in employee social insurance used the grievance mechanism to raise a concern. The worker reported that after taking several days of sick leave, the portion of social insurance contributions that should have been borne by the factory as the employer was directly deducted from their wages when they returned to work and received their salary. The worker was also required to sign an agreement accepting the deduction. According to the worker, this was a rule communicated verbally by the factory: if a worker took more than seven days of leave in a month, they would have to personally bear the employer contribution portion that should have been paid by the factory. The worker had not seen any corresponding written document.

The worker knew about this rule but still needed to take leave at the time. The difficulty was that necessary personal and health-related matters could not simply be avoided because of an additional social insurance cost; by the time wages were paid, the deduction had already occurred. When asked whether they agreed to the deduction, the worker responded: "Does it matter whether I agree?" and stated that the factory directly required a signature without asking whether they agreed. In this context, the signature cannot be understood as a voluntary acceptance of the arrangement.

The worker hoped that the factory would cancel the rule and stated that other workers had similar dissatisfaction but did not feel able to raise objections internally. The worker therefore requested anonymous feedback. The change sought concerned the specific deduction practice, while also maintaining the employment relationship that provided a stable income.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Social Security and Wage and Hour issues, specifically the factory's responsibility for social insurance contributions, wage deductions and the impact of leave rules on workers' income and protection. The portion of social insurance contributions that the factory is legally responsible for must not be transferred to workers because they have taken more than seven days of leave.[8] The wage deductions described by the worker and the requirement to sign indicate a potential adverse impact arising from the factory transferring its contribution obligations to workers. A signature does not remove the factory's legal obligation to make contributions; the investigation must also determine whether workers were able to refuse the deduction and whether they experienced pressure as a result. The remedy process should address the scope, amount and period of the deductions, stop improper deductions, return employer contribution amounts that workers have paid on the factory's behalf, and correct the relevant factory rule.

The factory needs to clarify who established and implemented the verbal rule, how deductions were processed, how costs were allocated, and whether workers could raise objections when asked to sign. It also needs to address improper deductions and the related factory rule. The worker had explained that they understood the rule but still needed to take leave due to illness; the remedy required is to address the additional contribution burden imposed on workers who needed to take leave.

Advancing the investigation also required consideration of the worker's concerns about brand involvement. The worker worried that reporting the issue to the brand could harm the factory and potentially affect their own employment and timely wage payments, and therefore wished to communicate only with the factory. Handshake needed to explain the feedback recipient,

investigation pathway and confidentiality arrangements, while communicating with the brand about the worker's desire to remain employed, ensuring that the process focused on correcting deductions, implementing remedy and protecting the worker. Anonymous feedback also involves privacy and personal information protection; the signature for deductions and the worker's circumstances after raising the grievance also need to be addressed through grievance procedures and non-retaliation protection.

Participation and the Remediation Process

The Handshake team first reviewed the social insurance contribution arrangements, how the factory rule had been communicated, the deduction process and whether other workers were affected. After verification, the team clarified that the investigation concerned the practice of deducting employer social insurance contributions from workers' wages despite workers already being enrolled in social insurance, rather than simply whether social insurance registration had been completed.

The Handshake team initially understood the worker's situation as one where the worker did not know before taking leave that they would have to bear the cost. The worker clarified that they were aware of the rule but still needed to take leave due to illness. The team then revised its understanding: the issue requiring remedy was the additional contribution burden imposed on workers who could not avoid taking leave, as well as the wage deductions that had already occurred.

Handshake explained to the worker that the portion of social insurance contributions legally payable by the factory should not be transferred to workers because they had taken more than seven days of leave, and confirmed the worker's anonymity request. When Handshake mentioned reporting the issue to the brand, the worker repeatedly asked whether communication could be limited to the factory and whether the brand could be excluded, expressing concern that the factory might be harmed and that this could affect their employment and income. Handshake further explained that reporting to the brand would still require investigation and verification before pressing the factory to take action, and committed not to disclose the worker's personal information to the brand. The worker replied "Okay" while continuing to emphasise the hope of keeping the job and not causing difficulties for the factory. Handshake subsequently submitted an anonymous request for investigation and remedy to the brand.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

As of 18 August 2026, Handshake had documented the deduction experience, anonymity request and concerns regarding the feedback pathway, and had submitted requests for investigation and remedy to the brand. The brand and factory's investigation responses, handling of deducted amounts and adjustment of the factory rule remain subject to further follow-up.

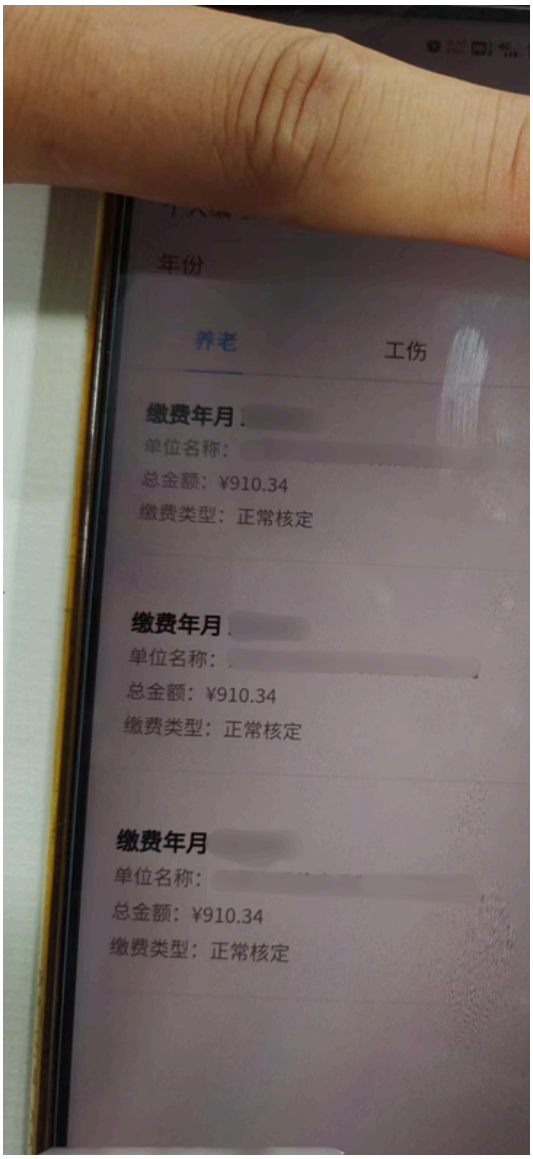


Case Discussion

The worker's explanation corrected the team's initial understanding of the issue. The team initially focused on whether the worker had known about the deduction rule in advance, but the worker clarified that they knew about the rule and still had to take leave due to illness. The issue requiring remedy was therefore the factory transferring social insurance costs that it should have borne onto workers who needed to take leave. Providing notice of the rule does not remove the adverse impact; remedy should stop the transfer of responsibility, return improper deductions and change the rule. Social insurance and wage deductions are closely connected in this case, affecting whether workers can retain the protection and income they are entitled to when they need rest and time to address health needs.

The worker's response, "Does it matter whether I agree?", reflected the fact that wages had already been deducted and the factory had required a signature. The signature could not adequately represent the worker's genuine willingness and could not remove the factory's contribution obligations. The investigation should clarify who established and implemented the deduction rule and what treatment workers would face if they refused to sign or raised objections. Remedy should both correct improper deductions and protect workers' right to express disagreement.

The worker sought both cancellation of the deduction practice and retention of stable employment, and these two concerns together influenced the feedback approach. The concern about brand involvement came from the worker's understanding of the relationship between factory operations and their own income security. Handshake therefore explained the investigation pathway and reported the issue to the brand in accordance with the anonymity request. This local engagement brought employment dependence into remedy decisions: when the brand presses the factory to correct the rule, it also needs to consider grievance protection and the worker's continued employment circumstances. Handshake should continue to understand the pressure experienced by the worker. Reporting the issue to the brand initiated the remedy process; subsequent outcomes should be reflected in the return of deducted amounts, changes to the rule and the worker's ability to remain safely employed.



*An electronic proof of social security contribution for a worker

Payment of Social Security Arrears After Employment Ends

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

In May 2026, a former worker sought assistance through the Handshake grievance mechanism. The worker stated that they joined the factory in March 2010 and left in May 2025. After leaving employment, the worker printed their social insurance record and discovered that contributions from an earlier period had not been paid. The worker requested payment of missing social insurance contributions from April 2010 to October 2014. Among these, the worker's personal contribution portion had already been deducted from wages in October 2014, but the record did not show corresponding payment.

The factory's subsequent handling report divided the worker's employment history into three periods: employment with employing entity A from December 2010 to January 2014; employing entity B from February 2014 to February 2021; and employing entity C from March 2021 to May 2025, with the employment relationship ultimately ending by mutual agreement with entity C. Employing entity A had been deregistered; the report stated that entity B later relocated and changed its name, while entity C was a branch. These three periods involved different employing entities, but the materials did not explain whether resignation and re-employment procedures had been completed during the two transitions between entities, nor whether the workplace location had changed.

The worker had previously undergone surgery due to health issues and did not immediately contact Handshake after discovering the problem. The worker stated that they had not been informed at the time of joining that social insurance would not be provided, and said: "If I had been told there would be no insurance, I would not have joined." The worker hoped to have the missing contributions paid, provided payment records and agreed to provide necessary identity information to relevant parties to help secure payment of their missing contributions.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Social Security and Wage and Hour issues, specifically historical contribution obligations, actual payment after individual contributions had been deducted from wages, and remedy for periods of unpaid contributions. The handling process also involves Code of Conduct (CoC) requirements on information disclosure and record management: the factory needs to provide a complete explanation of employment periods, relationships between employing entities and contribution records, while the brand needs to verify the progress of payment of contribution arrears before reporting the outcome.[11] Settlement or waiver clauses in a separation agreement do not remove statutory social insurance contribution obligations.[8] The worker's claim requires the actual employment periods, relevant employing entities and contribution records to be matched, with periods eligible for payment of contribution arrears and periods still requiring action clearly identified. Regarding the brand's request to return "relevant benefits", the brand and factory should clarify the nature, amount and basis of such payments. Handshake should verify the relationship between this request and social insurance contribution obligations, avoiding situations where the worker is required to bear additional costs without sufficient explanation.

The Handshake team verified employment contracts and progressed the case according to different employing entities and periods of unpaid contributions. The factory's explanations regarding the relationship between entities differed across reports: the initial report described employing entity A as a "predecessor", while a later report stated that the two entities only had overlapping employees and had no substantive relationship in terms of equity, business, finance or operations. These statements represent the factory's interpretation of responsibility relationships; existing case records do not explain how the differences between the two reports were

resolved. Responsibility needs to be clarified through employment contracts and other employment-related materials, and the worker's remedy claim cannot be excluded solely based on the factory's explanation of relationships between employing entities.

There was also an unexplained difference regarding the starting point of employment. The worker stated that employment began in March 2010 and requested payment of contribution arrears from April onwards, while the factory's employment records began from December of the same year. The worker noted that work injury insurance records appeared from December in the contribution statement, but the starting point of contribution records does not necessarily represent the actual start date of employment. The employment and contribution situation between April and November 2010 was not explained in the existing case records.

Participation and the Remediation Process

The Handshake team first verified with the worker the process of joining and leaving employment, when the unpaid contributions were discovered and the specific months involved. The team distinguished between periods where no individual contribution had been deducted and no payment had been made, and periods where the worker stated that contributions had been deducted but not paid. The team also asked whether the factory had ever informed the worker that social insurance would not be provided or imposed any waiting conditions. After obtaining the worker's consent, Handshake communicated the worker's request for payment of missing contributions to relevant parties. Following verification of employment contracts, the team addressed periods involving different employing entities separately. The subsequent payment of missing contributions from February to October 2014 corresponded to the period when the worker was employed by entity B, as identified in the factory's report.

On 18 May 2026, the worker informed Handshake that factory personnel had contacted them and committed to paying the missing social insurance contributions for February to October 2014. The worker agreed to this arrangement, and both parties were preparing the required documents before attending the social insurance authority.
On the same day, the brand referred to the separation agreement in its response while confirming that private agreements could not remove social insurance contribution obligations. The brand also stated that the worker's share of the contributions needed to be checked as part of the arrears payment process and requested the return of what it described as relevant benefits obtained due to the failure to make normal contributions. The records did not further explain the nature, amount or actual handling of these payments.

For earlier periods, the brand stated that if payment of contribution arrears could not be completed through administrative procedures due to factors such as the deregistration of employing entity A, its coordination role would end and the worker could pursue the matter through judicial or administrative channels. Based on verified contracts and the deregistration status of entity A, the team determined that remaining claims against this entity would need to proceed through judicial channels and exceeded what could be directly advanced through this non-judicial grievance mechanism. The factory's subsequent report and the period listed in the team's final follow-up referred to the earlier period as December 2010 to January 2014, which was eight months shorter than the worker's original claim beginning in April 2010. This difference was not further explained.

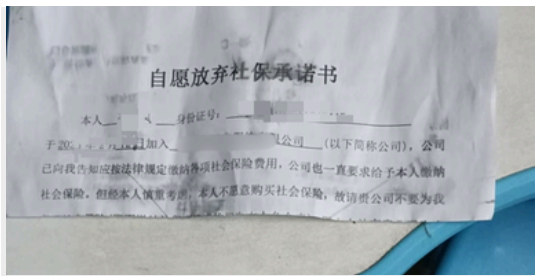
Progress towards paying the contribution arrears was further verified through worker feedback. The brand had previously reported that the relevant arrears had been paid, but during communication on 26 May 2026, the worker stated that factory personnel were still required to submit documents and confirm procedures. On 22 June 2026, the worker proactively informed Handshake that the factory and worker had completed payment of the

arrears for February to October 2014 on 18 June 2026, and expressed satisfaction with Handshake's support.

On 24 June 2026, the team again explained to the worker that the original employing entity had been deregistered and that earlier periods could continue to be pursued through judicial channels. The worker acknowledged this information and decided not to pursue court proceedings at that stage. Handshake subsequently closed the case. The worker did not explain the reasons for this decision. Whether concerns existed regarding the time, cost or difficulty of further pursuit remains something that may be explored if the worker wishes to discuss it in the future.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

Social insurance arrears for February to October 2014 have been paid, corresponding to the worker's employment period with employing entity B. Contributions for earlier periods were not paid through this case. The worker initially requested payment of missing contributions from April 2010 onwards, but subsequent records only specifically addressed December 2010 to January 2014. How the claim relating to April to November 2010 should be handled remains unexplained. The worker recognised the completed actions and decided not to pursue the remaining claim through the courts at that stage, but no remedy has been provided for the remaining periods.



*A factory required workers to sign an agreement voluntarily waiving social security contributions; however, the agreement holds no legal validity, even though the workers mistakenly believed that this was a right they could waive.

Case Discussion

Addressing historical unpaid contributions requires matching the worker's actual employment experience with the employing entities, contribution periods and records listed in the factory's reports. After verifying contracts and understanding the status of the entities involved, the team advanced payment of contribution arrears for the periods that could be handled. Understanding local employment contracts, social insurance procedures and the responsibilities of different entities was essential in determining whom to approach, what documents were required and which issues could be advanced through this mechanism. Settlement arrangements in a separation agreement did not remove historical social insurance contribution obligations.

The information and feedback provided by the worker were important for clarifying the scope and progress of the case. The worker's employment start date and original claim preceded the starting point in the factory's employment records. Handshake should require relevant parties to explain these gaps and match the handling of each period against the original claim. After the brand reported that payment of contribution arrears had been completed, the worker clarified that documents still needed to be submitted and later confirmed that the process had actually been completed. The brand's report before completion was therefore inaccurate. Worker feedback corrected this information and highlighted the need for stronger verification: the factory should provide evidence of actual completion, the brand should verify the basis of its reporting, and Handshake should continue following up on whether the missing contributions had actually been paid, rather than relying on the worker alone to identify and correct discrepancies.

Contributions for part of the period covered by the claim were paid through this case. For remaining claims involving the deregistered entity, the team explained the judicial pathway based on verified information and recognised the limits of this non-judicial mechanism.

Delayed Delivery of Social Security Documents

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

In April 2026, a former worker at a factory in Vietnam sought assistance through the Handshake grievance mechanism. They needed to obtain their social insurance contribution record in order to apply for unemployment benefits. According to the worker's recollection, the factory had previously informed them that the document could be obtained approximately 15 days after submission to the social insurance authority. However, the document had still not been delivered after that period. Other workers who left employment at the same time had already received their documents. Despite asking the human resources department multiple times, the main response they received was that the document had not yet been received, without a clear update on progress or an expected completion date.

The worker was concerned that continued waiting could affect their ability to submit the required documents within the application period. They hoped that the factory would clarify where the document was, why the process had not been completed and arrange delivery as soon as possible. After leaving employment, they still needed to rely on coordination between the former factory and the social insurance authority to complete the process, while lacking sufficient information to assess progress and determine the next steps.



Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Social Security, specifically the delivery of contribution records after employment ends and applications for unemployment benefits. The process also involves record management, progress communication and grievance handling requirements. The termination of employment does not remove the former employer's obligation to complete relevant procedures; any pressure experienced after raising the concern should be addressed through grievance protection and non-retaliation measures. The worker needed to obtain the social insurance contribution record in order to apply for unemployment benefits and was concerned that further delay would affect their ability to complete the application within the required timeframe.

In this case, the social insurance authority was responsible for issuing the document, while the factory was responsible for submitting the required documents and following up on processing. The investigation needed to clarify whether the required materials had been submitted, where the delay occurred and whether the delay affected the worker's benefit application. Delivering the document enabled the worker to continue the application process; further follow-up was still needed to understand the application outcome and identify appropriate remedy pathways if the delay resulted in loss of benefits.

The factory's communication records showed that follow-up requests had previously been made, but the worker still did not receive the document or clear progress information in time to plan their unemployment benefit application. The investigation needed to verify why the social insurance authority had not processed the document and whether the factory had fulfilled its responsibilities in tracking progress and providing updates. Previous follow-up efforts did not mean that the procedural responsibility had been fulfilled. The factory should establish escalation arrangements when progress is delayed and provide workers with information on current status and next steps.

Participation and The Remediation Process

On 12 April 2026, the Handshake team informed the factory of the worker's delayed document delivery and concerns regarding their benefit application, requesting verification of the cause and follow-up action. On 13 April 2026, the factory responded that the social insurance authority had confirmed the document had been overlooked during processing. Human resources personnel subsequently went to the authority in person to collect the document and contacted the worker for collection. During follow-up the next day, the worker confirmed that they had received the document on 13 April 2026.

The follow-up also found that, although the worker had received the document, they remained dissatisfied with the factory's previous handling. They stated that human resources personnel had not explained the reason for the delay, the expected timeline or the actions being taken, and that effective support was only provided after a third party became involved. Handshake shared this experience with the factory. The factory provided previous follow-up records and explained that the responses from the social insurance authority had also been unclear, and that it had not intentionally delayed or withheld the document.

Based on this, Handshake clarified the follow-up requirements as improving procedural tracking and communication: establishing escalation points when there is no progress, identifying responsible persons for continued follow-up, recording submission and processing status, and informing workers of known progress and outstanding uncertainties. The factory acknowledged the need for improvement and committed to strengthening follow-up and coordination with the social insurance authority.

On 22 April 2026, the worker further explained that they had already understood that the document was issued by the social insurance authority. They also reported that human resources personnel had blamed them for the matter after Handshake became involved.

The worker did not wish to provide further details and hoped to close the case. Handshake subsequently clarified to the factory that workers have the right to choose internal or third-party grievance channels according to their own needs and level of trust. Handshake also requested that the factory strengthen case confidentiality, improve the communication and mediation capabilities of grievance handlers, and implement non-retaliation protection.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

The worker received the social insurance contribution record, and the request for document delivery was addressed. The factory committed to improving tracking and communication mechanisms, although actual implementation requires further observation. Existing records do not provide further information on the outcome of the unemployment benefit application or any further handling of the worker's report that human resources personnel had blamed them.

Case Discussion

The delay in delivering the document made it difficult for the worker to prepare materials required for their unemployment benefit application in a timely manner. Before Handshake's involvement, the worker had only received the response that the document had "not yet been received", leaving them unable to understand where the delay occurred. After Handshake became involved, the factory confirmed with the social insurance authority that the document had been overlooked and arranged for human resources personnel to collect it. Understanding the respective responsibilities of the local social insurance authority and the factory allowed the process to move from waiting for updates to identifying the omission and obtaining the document. Local institutional knowledge was therefore translated into a specific administrative action.

After receiving the document, the worker remained dissatisfied and further identified shortcomings in the factory's communication about progress. They already understood that the document was issued by the social insurance authority; what they needed to know was why their document had been delayed, what actions the factory had taken and how they could obtain it. Based on this feedback, Handshake requested clearer responsibility for enquiries, follow-up and escalation arrangements, and the factory agreed to improve related procedures. The worker's feedback moved the remedy process beyond simply delivering a document towards addressing the factory's responsibility to provide information: even where delays occur at an external institution, the factory still needs to follow up on procedures within its responsibility and provide workers with usable progress information.

The worker's report that human resources personnel blamed them for using an external mechanism involved the right to choose a grievance channel and protection from retaliation. Handshake therefore raised confidentiality and non-retaliation requirements and requested improvements to grievance handlers' communication practices. The focus of remedy was to stop pressure and ensure safe access to grievance channels, rather than simply ease the relationship between the parties. Delivering the document addressed one practical barrier, but whether workers can ask about progress and use external mechanisms without being blamed also affects their ability to access social protection. Localised remedy requires not only understanding administrative pathways, but also identifying how those handling procedures influence workers' access to information and ability to raise concerns, and pressing factories to stop blaming workers for seeking assistance.



*Image source: Internet. This is a social insurance payment receipt from Vietnam.

Comparative Summary

Local pathways for social security remedy

The shared rights claims related to social protection corresponded to different responsibilities and remedy pathways across the three cases. Where factories transferred their own contribution obligations to workers, remedy required the return of deducted amounts and changes to the relevant rules. Historical unpaid contributions required verification of employing entities, relevant periods and which matters could be processed through available procedures. Post-employment document delivery involved the former employer's follow-up of administrative procedures and the social security authority's issuance of required documents. Understanding these differences is essential to ensuring that workers' specific claims enter the appropriate remedy process.

Aspect	Leave-Related Deductions	Social Security Contribution Delinquency	Delayed Social Security Certificate
Rights and Responsibilities	Social Security, Wage and Hour: Stop transferring employer contribution obligations through leave rules; return improper deductions; protect anonymous grievance participation.	Social Security, Wage and Hour: Fulfil contribution responsibilities according to relevant periods; comply with information disclosure and record management requirements; provide complete employment, contribution and remedy progress information.	Social Security: Ensure timely delivery of documents required for benefit applications; factory follows up procedures and communicates progress; social security authority issues documents; protect grievance participation.
Specific Impact of Worker Participation	The worker's clarification that they "knew but still needed to take leave" corrected the team's initial understanding; concerns about remaining employed influenced feedback communication.	Provided details and supported verification of partial payment of contribution arrears; chose not to pursue the earlier arrears through the courts at that stage, leaving unresolved claims.	Continued to express dissatisfaction after receiving documents, prompting follow-up on tracking and protection requirements.
Localised Approaches	Combined understanding of illness, employment dependence and anonymity concerns to investigate deductions and protection requirements.	Verified different employing entities, unpaid periods and procedural authority; advanced payment of some arrears and explained judicial pathways.	Reviewed coordination between the social insurance authority and the factory; required clear progress updates, responsible persons and escalation procedures.

Comparison Dimension	Leave-Related Deductions	Historical Social Security Arrears	Delayed Social Security Documents
Changes Reported	Investigation and remedy requests submitted; no information yet on refunds or rule changes.	Social insurance arrears for February to October 2014 paid.	Social insurance contribution document delivered.
Outstanding Issues	Refund of deducted amounts and adjustment of factory rules remain unresolved.	Earlier unpaid periods remain unresolved; subsequent records did not explain how the April–November 2010 claim was handled; reasons for not pursuing court proceedings at that stage remain unclear.	Unemployment benefit application outcome, mechanism commitments and handling of reported pressure following the grievance remain to be understood.

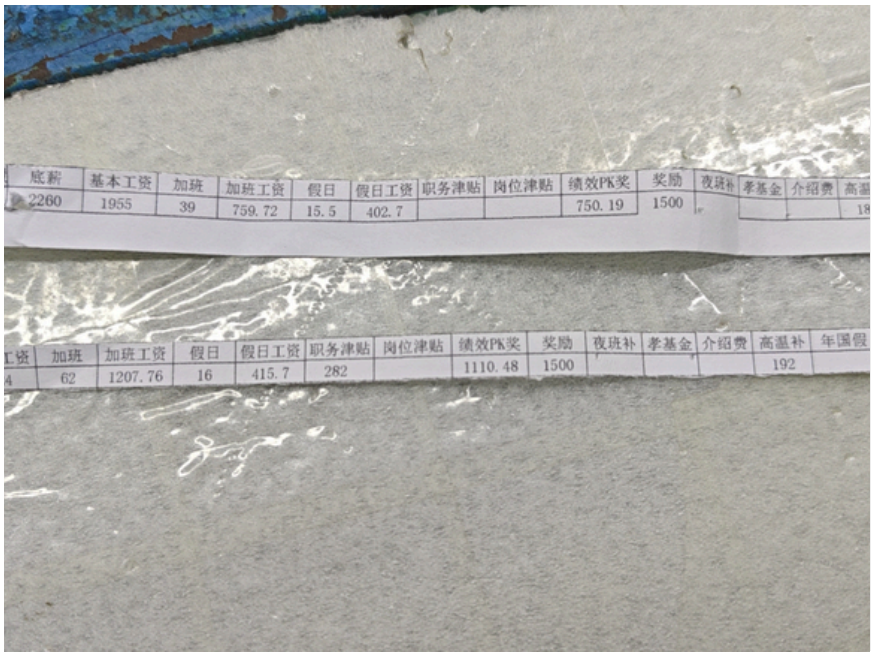
Understanding workers' circumstances helps adjust investigation and remedy pathways. The factory's responsibilities as the employer for contributions and administrative procedures, as well as the brand's responsibilities based on its relationship to the adverse impacts, each need to be fulfilled. Necessary leave, medical treatment and post-employment benefit applications should be incorporated into remedy arrangements; they cannot be used as reasons to transfer costs to workers or narrow the scope of remedy. Where workers express acceptance of a particular arrangement, this should also be understood in the context of their original claims and the outcomes that have actually occurred.

The value of understanding local systems lies in verifying specific relationships and identifying available pathways. Social insurance documents are issued by relevant authorities and collected through factory follow-up; historical unpaid contributions require distinguishing between employing entities and the scope of available mechanisms. Where remaining claims involving deregistered entities need to proceed through judicial channels, this demonstrates the boundaries of the current non-judicial process. These boundaries should be explained to workers, and unresolved matters should remain documented rather than allowing case closure to replace an accurate account of outcomes.

After workers raise concerns, their assessment of the handling process may continue to reveal new issues. The worker's report of being blamed by human resources after receiving the document should be addressed as a grievance protection matter. Inconsistencies in reported payment of contribution arrears progress require verification against actual completion status. Where workers do not explain the reasons for choosing not to pursue the remaining claim further, the team may retain space to understand their considerations if they wish to discuss them, but should not replace the worker's own explanation with assumptions.

Themes 03

Production Arrangements and Forced Labour Risks



底薪	基本工资	加班	加班工资	假日	假日工资	职务津贴	岗位津贴	绩效PK奖	奖励	夜班补	孝基金	介绍费	高温
2260	1955	39	759.72	15.5	402.7			750.19	1500				18

工资	加班	加班工资	假日	假日工资	职务津贴	岗位津贴	绩效PK奖	奖励	夜班补	孝基金	介绍费	高温补	年国假
4	62	1207.76	16	415.7	282		1110.48	1500				192	

*A wage slip belonging to a factory worker, used in this specific case to prove that their wages had been withheld.

Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

Thematic Introduction
Voluntariness of work and management constraints

Thematic Introduction

Voluntariness of work and management constraints

Working time issues concern whether workers can independently decide whether to work overtime and receive the rest and remuneration to which they are entitled. Handshake's case experience indicates that the voluntariness of work may be constrained by daily production arrangements and workplace relationships: even where workers express a desire not to continue working, management pressure or concerns about losing employment may make it difficult for them to leave. Discussions on working hours therefore need to consider not only the duration of work, but also workers' actual choices and the consequences they may face after refusing.

Identifying forced labour requires analysis of the relationship between involuntary work and threats of penalty.[9] The fact that workers previously agreed to overtime, or that a factory's policies state that overtime is voluntary, does not by itself demonstrate that subsequent work remains a free choice. At the same time, excessive working hours and high-intensity work may affect workers' rest and health, while work that is not fully recorded may affect access to remuneration.[10] These rights issues may arise from the same production arrangements and require separate identification of adverse impacts and remedy measures while understanding their interconnections.

This section focuses on how everyday management power affects the voluntariness of work and how these constraints are addressed. Local teams need to understand workers' employment relationships, workplace power dynamics and conditions for expression, allowing differences between written policies and actual experiences to enter the investigation process. Workers' experiences and assessments should influence the focus of handling. Factories must stop inappropriate restrictions, provide due remuneration and ensure safe grievance channels, while brands should follow up on relevant investigations and remedy measures. After policy changes are introduced, whether workers can genuinely exercise their right to refuse overtime remains an important basis for assessing remedy progress.

Overtime cancellation still requires supervisor approval

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

In April 2026, a worker at a factory in Vietnam used the grievance mechanism to report long-standing high-intensity overtime arrangements. According to the worker, normal working hours were from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, with a one-hour break in between. Workers were also required to work overtime until 9:00 pm on weekdays, with an additional eight hours of work scheduled on Sundays. The worker stated that this arrangement had existed since they joined the factory the previous year and that overtime was usually announced by human resources through factory broadcasts.

The worker stated that when they asked supervisors for permission not to work overtime, the requests were usually rejected for various reasons. The worker was concerned that repeatedly raising the issue would lead supervisors to deliberately find fault with their work afterwards. According to the worker, approval to refuse overtime was rarely granted. The worker also mentioned a labour conditions assessment conducted by another organisation at the factory, which was not part of Handshake's grievance investigation. A worker had previously informed the assessors about Sunday work arrangements and was subsequently criticised by management, which linked the disclosure to potential order losses. The worker further reported that Sunday wages were not included in regular records and that management prevented assessors from viewing relevant information on workers' phones on the grounds that phones were personal property. These statements indicated potential differences between actual working hours, wage records and external disclosures. Both refusal of overtime and truthful reporting were accompanied by

concerns about possible retaliation. The worker hoped that the factory would arrange working hours reasonably and protect workers' right to refuse overtime.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case concerns Forced Labour risks, Wage and Hour issues and Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) issues. Specifically, it requires addressing the voluntariness of overtime, total working hours, weekly rest periods, recording and payment of all overtime, and health risks arising from prolonged excessive working hours. The worker's statements regarding Sunday wages not being included in regular records and being asked to conceal working hours from external assessors also involve CoC information disclosure and record management requirements, requiring investigation into whether factory records and explanations are accurate and complete.[11]

The investigation must also determine whether workers can refuse overtime and whether they face penalties or pressure after refusing. The difficulty described by the worker was that supervisors did not allow them to leave on time and created concerns about being targeted afterwards. The investigation should examine specific experiences of refusing overtime, supervisors' responses and subsequent treatment at work. For workers who had previously agreed to overtime but later wished to withdraw their agreement, the investigation should also verify whether they were required to provide reasons or obtain approval when withdrawing consent. Broadcast announcements are only a method of arranging overtime; the key question is whether workers had a genuine choice to refuse.

The factory's subsequent investigation stated that interviews did not identify involuntary overtime or related pressure. This differed from the worker's original concern and requires further review of the investigation conditions and evidence basis: whether interviewed workers feared identification or retaliation, whether interviews covered specific experiences of refusing overtime, and whether the information provided by the factory was complete and accurately reflected the situation. Handshake cannot exclude risks solely because the factory reported that no issues were identified. Instead, it should continue verification through feedback from other workers, actual procedures and records, and require further investigation from the brand and factory where gaps or inconsistencies are identified.The worker's report that another worker was criticised after disclosing Sunday work to external assessors also requires further verification. The brand should require the factory to provide complete attendance records and Sunday wage payment records, clarify whether information provided to external assessors was accurate, and determine whether workers were asked to conceal actual working hours. Handshake should continue understanding whether the worker experienced retaliation and respect the worker's choice regarding whether to provide phone-related information. This involves personal information protection and safe grievance participation. The factory should provide accurate working hour and wage records and cannot use protection of phone privacy as a reason to require workers to conceal actual working hours.

Participation and the Remediation Process

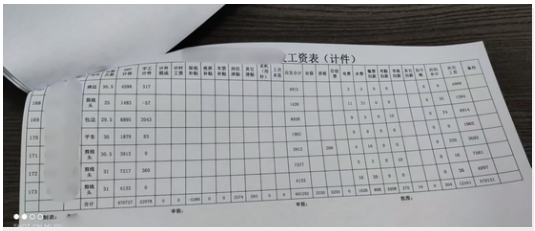
The Handshake team first asked about daily working hours, methods of overtime notification, responses after refusing overtime and whether workers had ever been permitted not to work overtime. The team addressed long working hours and difficulties in refusing overtime together and requested that the factory investigate. The factory subsequently reported that it had conducted departmental reviews, temporarily stopped arranging overtime through factory broadcasts and reiterated requirements for voluntary overtime and the prohibition of pressure.

After the factory submitted interview records, policies and training materials in June, Handshake continued engaging with other workers and reviewed whether available grievance channels could be used in practice. The grievance poster only listed a headquarters telephone number. Handshake asked the brand whether this channel was accessible for workers at the relevant branch factory. The brand subsequently confirmed the responsible personnel and coverage scope and requested additional training, public communication, procedures and investigation records.

Feedback from other workers indicated that they had participated in training, seen workplace notices and were willing to work overtime. This information supported the account that those activities had taken place, but it did not explain the difficulties experienced by the original worker when attempting to refuse overtime. Further review was therefore required to understand what workers actually encounter when refusing or cancelling overtime.

A subsequent review of procedures found that workers who had registered for overtime but wished to cancel at short notice were required to inform supervisors and complete an exit form, which included reasons and approval requirements. The factory considered this process simple and necessary for attendance and safety management. On 12 July 2026, Handshake questioned why workers who were simply choosing to leave at their normal finishing time still needed approval. Since existing attendance systems could already record working hours, the team asked whether the additional exit form created an unnecessary barrier to cancelling overtime.

Following further questions from the brand, the factory clarified that the exit procedure applied only to workers who had registered for overtime but later cancelled it, as well as workers leaving before the end of normal working hours. The brand further noted that requiring reasons and approval specifically for cancelling overtime could lead



*The factory uses a standardized wage register, and workers are required to sign off on it individually to verify the details.

workers to believe that leaving overtime required management permission, affecting their freedom of choice.

On 17 July 2026, the factory reported that the procedure had been simplified: workers cancelling registered overtime no longer needed to provide reasons, obtain management approval or complete an exit form, and could leave normally at 5:00 pm. Teams would only record the list of workers who cancelled overtime for attendance, wage and internal management purposes. The factory committed that such records would not be used for disciplinary action, negative evaluations, reduction of benefits or other forms of pressure. The revised arrangements would be communicated to supervisors, security personnel, human resources and workers. The factory had also provided additional training for absent workers and newly hired workers and adjusted the frequency of collecting worker feedback on overtime voluntariness, grievance protection and improvement measures from once every six months to once every quarter.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

As of the follow-up on 17 July 2026, the factory had reported the removal of the exit form, reason and approval requirements for cancelling overtime. Previous feedback from other workers also supported that related training and workplace communications had taken place. The original worker who raised the concern did not provide further responses. Existing records do not provide a complete outcome on whether the revised cancellation process continued to face barriers in daily implementation or whether the long working hours initially reported had been reduced on a sustained basis.

Case Discussion

This case applies the concept of "voluntary overtime" to a specific question: can workers who have already registered for overtime change their decision and leave at their normal finishing time? The factory explained the requirements for providing reasons, obtaining supervisor approval and completing exit procedures as measures for attendance and safety management. However, these requirements made stopping overtime dependent on whether management granted permission. Handshake continued to question why approval was required for workers simply leaving at their normal finishing time and pressed the factory, through the brand, to remove these requirements. The remedy process therefore addressed management arrangements that restricted choice, rather than only repeating the principle that overtime should be voluntary.

Identifying this barrier required understanding how overtime registration, attendance systems, supervisor approval and gate procedures jointly affected workers' ability to leave. Reviewing only training records or feedback that other workers were willing to work overtime could not answer the refusal difficulties described by the worker. By examining the actual process of leaving work, the investigation translated the general concept of "voluntary" into an actionable requirement: workers should be able to leave at their normal finishing time without explaining why they cancelled overtime or obtaining permission. The factory's communication of the revised arrangement to supervisors, security personnel, human resources and workers was also important to ensure that the change could be implemented across different stages of the process.

The retention of overtime cancellation records for attendance and wage management also requires controls on their use. If such records were used for disciplinary action, negative evaluations or reductions in benefits, workers' formal ability to cancel overtime could still be undermined. At the same time, the long hours originally reported continue to involve rest and occupational health and safety concerns, and actual working hours after the removal of approval requirements should continue to be monitored. Forced Labour risks, Wage and Hour issues, occupational health and safety and grievance protection need to be addressed together. In response to workers' concerns about possible consequences of speaking up, the mechanism should continue providing safe channels for feedback and assessing workers' actual freedom of choice after the new arrangements are implemented, rather than treating a policy statement as the endpoint of remedy.

Restricted Rest Periods and Unpaid Overtime

The Worker's Circumstances and Requests

In May 2026, a worker at another factory in Vietnam reported to Handshake that production targets had suddenly increased. According to the worker, the original requirement of completing 250 products within two hours had been changed to completing the same quantity within one hour. The factory's original arrangement allowed a 10-minute rest period after every two hours of work, but when production targets needed to be met, workers were sometimes called back after only five or six minutes of rest, and sometimes were unable to take a break at all. The worker stated that when production targets were not achieved, supervisors did not allow workers to leave their positions to rest or use the toilet. Even after the scheduled finishing time, workers were required to continue working until the target was completed.

The worker stated that normal working hours were from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, with a one-hour lunch break, and that the worker had already signed up for overtime from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm. However, when production targets were not met, supervisors required workers to continue until 8:00 pm. This additional hour was not separately agreed upon and no overtime payment was provided. The worker stated that many people on the production line were over 40 years old and were concerned about pressure or losing their jobs if they raised concerns.

When workers reported insufficient rest to supervisors, they were told that the requirements came from factory management and that additional rest time could not be provided.

The worker hoped that the factory would stop unreasonable production requirements, allow workers to take full rest periods according to factory arrangements and pay the remuneration owed for actual overtime worked. The concern connected labour intensity, physical needs, working hours and wages: increased production pressure had affected rest periods, while failure to meet targets became a reason for workers to remain at their posts.

Rights and Responsibilities

This case primarily concerns requirements relating to the prohibition of Forced Labour. The worker reported that failure to meet production targets resulted in being prevented from using the toilet, taking rest breaks or leaving work at the scheduled time. These restrictions were used to require workers to continue working and therefore involve freedom of movement and voluntariness of work, requiring review as potential Forced Labour risks.

The same arrangement also involves other rights issues: inhumane treatment, where the factory applied pressure by restricting toilet access and rest periods; Wage and Hour, concerning whether extended working time was fully recorded and paid; and Environment, Health and Safety (EHS), concerning the impact of restricted rest, toilet access and work intensity on health. Whether overtime was voluntary and whether all working hours were recorded and paid require separate verification.[11]

The investigation should determine who issued the relevant instructions, how they were implemented, what happened when workers refused, and the health risks arising from increased production intensity and reduced rest arrangements. The supervisor's statement that requirements came from above



*The women's restroom at a factory

indicates that the investigation must cover both management-level instructions and frontline implementation.

The factory initially denied unpaid overtime, explaining that wages were calculated based on working hours and that production output was separately reflected through bonuses. The brand's response treated production targets as part of the factory's operational management responsibility while requiring correction of insufficient rest arrangements. These responses did not explain how the additional hour described by the worker was handled. Whether an hourly wage system existed and whether each period of actual work was included in records require separate verification. The investigation should compare the periods described by the worker with schedules, attendance records, overtime records and wage statements.

The factory needs to address production arrangements, rest implementation, working time records and historical remuneration. The brand needs to support verification and payment of outstanding amounts and cannot conclude its review of impacts solely by treating production targets as within factory management discretion. Handshake should continue understanding work processes, identify periods that may be missing from records and incorporate workers' concerns about unemployment and possible retaliation into follow-up communication.

Participation and the Remediation Process

During initial communication, the Handshake team reviewed production changes, the length of each rest period, normal working hours, agreed overtime periods and whether additional work was separately recorded. The team then requested the brand and factory to investigate issues relating to rest periods, wages, working hours and grievance handling.

On 23 June 2026, the factory reported that its investigation had identified insufficient rest arrangements. The brand requested the factory to stop using exit passes and proposed corrective measures. On the same day, the worker informed Handshake that the factory had stopped enforcing the previous production requirements and that workers could use the toilet during working hours. Regarding the remaining disagreement over overtime payment, Handshake continued to ask whether workers clocked out at 7:00 pm and then returned to work, how additional work was communicated, whether records covered actual working hours and whether workers could refuse. These questions aimed to clarify differences between schedules, actual time spent at work and wage records.

On 16 July 2026, the brand provided further updates: the factory had paid additional remuneration on 10 June 2026 to dozens of affected workers for work performed during rest periods, and on 10 July 2026 had paid additional overtime remuneration for the extra working time from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm to several affected workers. The two payments corresponded to different issues, and the records did not specify whether the groups of workers overlapped.

The brand also reported that the factory had removed toilet exit passes, retrained workers and management on working hours, rest periods, freedom of movement and grievance channels, and clarified that workers would not be penalised for failing to meet production targets. The factory planned to install rest reminder bells and continue monitoring implementation through management training, anonymous feedback channels and quarterly collection of worker feedback.

Handshake informed the worker of the remedy measures and asked whether overtime payments had been received, but did not receive a response. When contacted again on 3 August 2026, the worker stated that they had left the factory approximately one month earlier and could no longer verify the factory's current situation. Handshake subsequently attempted to ask whether the worker could obtain updates from former colleagues but received no further response.



*A factory failed to hire restroom cleaners, resulting in the restrooms being extremely dirty and unsanitary.

Progress Towards Remedy and Outstanding Issues

The worker's feedback in June indicated that the mandatory production pressure and restrictions on toilet access had improved. The brand's July update recorded two categories of wage arrears payments and management adjustments. However, follow-up records do not provide further information on whether the worker personally received the additional payments or whether rest and working hour arrangements continued to be implemented after the worker left employment. The rest reminder bell remains recorded as a planned measure.

Case Discussion

Production targets created overlapping rights impacts through restrictions on rest arrangements and leaving the workplace. The worker's description of increased targets, reduced rest periods, restricted toilet access and continued work after scheduled finishing times meant that production management involved multiple issues, including occupational health and safety, Wage and Hour, inhumane treatment and Forced Labour risks. The factory initially explained the wage issue by stating that wages were calculated based on working hours, but this did not address why the worker was required to continue working or how rest periods were being taken away. The brand initially treated production targets as part of the factory's operational management responsibility, but this also did not sufficiently address the related human rights impacts. By focusing on specific time periods, management instructions and attendance and wage records, Handshake's follow-up required each impact to be examined separately.

The local team's understanding of production processes, time recording and leaving procedures enabled a general dispute over production targets to be translated into specific remedy requirements: which periods involved actual work without payment, during which rest periods workers were required to work, and which permissions restricted workers' ability to use the toilet or leave. The worker subsequently confirmed that restrictions on toilet access and forced completion of production targets had improved. The brand separately reported two types of wage payments. Payment for previously underpaid wages addressed losses that had already occurred; restoring rest periods, removing toilet access restrictions and stopping compulsory extensions of working time addressed workers' future ability to rest and end work voluntarily. Each remedy element needs to be implemented separately.

This handling process also extended beyond an individual grievance to shared management rules and the remuneration of multiple workers. Changes to rules expanded the scope of improvement, but the payments received by individual workers and whether production pressure continues in daily work still require assessment based on actual experiences. After the worker left employment, the mechanism should continue to maintain channels for the worker to understand and pursue owed remuneration, while also gathering feedback from current workers on the implementation of revised rules, ensuring that both collective corrective actions and individual remedy continue to be followed up.



*A factory did not hire restroom cleaners and required employees to take on the additional task of cleaning the restrooms without providing any extra compensation.

Comparative Summary

Practical protection of voluntary work

Aspect	Refusing Overtime	Production Targets, Rest and Remuneration
Rights and Responsibilities	Forced Labour risks, Wage and Hour, EHS: Ensure workers' right to refuse overtime and receive weekly rest; accurately record and disclose all working hours and remuneration; stop pressure following grievance participation.	Forced Labour risks: Stop using production targets as a reason to restrict toilet access, rest periods and leaving work. Inhumane Treatment and EHS: Stop applying pressure and protect workers' physical needs and health. Wage and Hour: Record all working time and provide outstanding remuneration.
How The Investigation Progressed	The worker's reported difficulties in refusing overtime differed from the factory's interview findings; further verification of overtime cancellation procedures was required.	Differences between actual time spent at work and wage calculation explanations required further review of specific periods and records.
Localised Approaches	Understanding how supervisors, security personnel and human resources implement the procedures; requiring removal of the need to give reasons, obtain approval or complete exit forms.	Verifying production instructions, rest arrangements, attendance records and additional working time; separately addressing restrictions and payment requirements.
Actions Recorded	The factory reported removing approval requirements and other procedures for cancelling overtime; related training and workplace communications were supported by worker feedback.	The worker confirmed improvements in production pressure and toilet access; the brand reported two types of back payments for work during rest breaks and additional overtime.
Outstanding Issues / Further Follow-up	The original claimant did not provide further responses; post-refusal treatment, actual implementation and total working hours still require follow-up.	Whether the worker received the additional payments remains unclear; continued implementation after the worker's departure requires further understanding.

Both cases require examination of the differences between general explanations and workers' actual experiences. The factory's statements that no involuntary overtime was identified and that wages were calculated based on working hours did not answer why a particular worker could not leave work normally or whether a specific period of work had been paid for. Handshake continued verification through specific procedures and time periods, while the brand and factory needed to respond to the relevant responsibilities.

The value of local knowledge lies in understanding how restrictions are implemented in daily work: who approves workers leaving, who requires workers to continue working, how records are created and what workers may experience after refusing. These understandings support specific remedy actions but do not justify inappropriate management practices. Even after procedures are removed, it remains necessary to understand whether power continues to restrict workers' choices through other daily arrangements.

Stopping coercive practices, restoring rest periods and paying outstanding remuneration are different remedy requirements. Where follow-up contact is limited, the team needs to accurately describe outcomes that have not yet been confirmed and continue verification through appropriate channels. A worker's lack of response does not indicate acceptance and cannot be used as evidence that remedy has not occurred.



*Line supervisors guiding factory workers on proper operating procedures.

Cross-Case Discussion

Strategic Insights from Localised Remedy



Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

> Workers are rights-holders at the centre of remedy.

Introduction

Remedy practices concerning heat exposure, social protection and production arrangements reveal the complex relationship between rights claims and actual changes. Workers' experiences may reshape understanding of the issue, livelihood needs and workplace relationships may affect conditions for participation, and the same management arrangement may create multiple rights impacts. The role of localisation is to develop and adjust remedy pathways under these specific conditions. This chapter draws on cross-case comparisons to discuss the relationship between contextual knowledge, meaningful participation, intersecting issues, the fulfilment of responsibilities and continuous feedback, and identifies practical insights for localisation strategies and effective remedy.

Contextual Knowledge and Decisions on Remedy

Workers who have spent long periods in specific roles are familiar with production processes, equipment and daily management practices, and they also understand the possible consequences of raising different concerns. Through continued engagement with workers, workplace visits and follow-up on remedy processes, local teams gradually develop an understanding of workers' working and living conditions. This understanding of how specific workplaces operate and how workers are affected forms an important part of local knowledge in remedy practice.

This knowledge is important because written policies and inspection records need to be understood in the context of actual implementation. Knowing that a factory has rest arrangements also requires understanding whether production schedules allow workers to take those breaks. Knowing that cooling equipment exists on site also requires understanding whether the equipment covers actual work areas when operating. Workers' experiences and observations from the workplace provide a basis for identifying these gaps and help teams determine what requires further investigation and what remedy measures need to change.

When workers' actual experiences differ from policies, inspection findings or the team's initial understanding, investigations need to further examine how these differences arise: which periods, which workers or which actual burdens have not been considered? Comparing workers' experiences with workplace observations and employment records can help determine whether the issue lies in the rule itself, the way it is implemented, or whether measures fail to meet actual needs. Worker participation therefore influences the definition of the issue, the selection of measures and the scope of corrective actions. Corresponding investigation and remedy requirements should also clarify the actions required from factories and brands.

For workplace risks such as heat exposure, site visits can verify the conditions underlying assessments and whether protection measures are effective in practice. Whether temperature measurements follow applicable standards, and whether measurement locations, timing and production conditions correspond to actual exposure, need to be reviewed together with the operation of ventilation and cooling equipment, airflow and coverage. Workers' long-term experience can help identify situations that were not present during inspections. Site verification and worker participation together answer key questions: under what working conditions do assessment results apply, which workers remain insufficiently protected and what should corrective actions change?

Local knowledge continues to develop through ongoing engagement and feedback processes. Rights awareness activities through locally used communication channels, as well as regular training and workplace visits at partner factories, enable grievance mechanisms to understand working conditions and identify issues that have become normalised before formal cases are raised. During remedy processes, continued communication also enables teams to understand how measures operate in practice and whether workers' circumstances and needs have changed. The value of localisation lies in allowing these relationships to continuously support assessment and action: new understanding can change investigation scope, implementation feedback can adjust remedy measures, and factories and brands need to act on their respective responsibilities in response.

Power Relationships and Meaningful Participation

Whether participation in remedy has a genuine impact depends on the extent of choice workers have when expressing their views. Raising a grievance, refusing an arrangement or requesting further action may affect income, employment and daily workplace relationships. If workers must bear these consequences alone, even a mechanism that listens to their views may only access the information they are willing to share after weighing risks. Worker-centred remedy therefore needs to address both rights impacts and barriers to participation, enabling workers to raise concerns, discuss options and decide how to continue asserting their rights.

The role of localisation is to identify how these barriers arise through specific relationships. Management pressure may occur through daily questioning, team interactions and work arrangements. Understanding its impact requires knowledge of local communication practices, management authority and existing workplace relationships. Protecting anonymity therefore involves specific choices: which facts are sufficient to support an investigation, which details may allow factory personnel to identify individuals, and which feedback methods are appropriate for workers' circumstances at the time. Decisions about investigation information should be discussed with workers and adjusted as workplace relationships change. Factories need to stop trying to identify complainants and exerting pressure, brands need to follow up on protection measures, and grievance mechanisms need to continue providing safe channels for communication.



*Factory workers reading promotional materials about the Handshake Worker's Hotline.



*Factory workers chatting happily while adding the Handshake Worker's Hotline contact information.

Workers' assessments of whether change is possible also influence the concerns they raise. Believing that working conditions cannot be improved may lead workers to focus on financial entitlements, while receiving new rights information may lead previously accepted arrangements to become issues they wish to raise again. Therefore, initial concerns both express workers' needs and reflect the choices they perceive as available at the time. The remedy process should enable workers to understand possible actions and their implications, and continue discussing remedy as new information and actual progress emerge. Decisions to pause or stop participation should be understood through workers' own explanations, while preserving space for them to raise concerns again in the future.

Progress in meaningful participation should be reflected in specific decisions that workers can influence: what information is disclosed during investigation, which needs proposed solutions address and how workers can raise different views after implementation. Removing inappropriate approval requirements, preventing retaliation, protecting identities and providing clear information about handling processes each changes the conditions for participation. Workers' views can influence remedy only when factories and brands also translate their responsibilities into daily management practices and remedy arrangements.

Intersecting Issues and Comprehensive Remedy

The challenge in addressing intersecting issues is that the same management arrangement may create multiple rights impacts, while individual measures may only address part of them. Production targets that restrict rest periods, toilet access and leaving work can involve Forced Labour risks, inhumane treatment, Wage and Hour issues and occupational health and safety. Heat-related situations may connect protection measures, allowances and grievance protection. CoC analysis needs to clarify each rights claim, while remedy strategies must further identify how these impacts were created through shared decisions and implementation practices in order to determine which rules and impacts need to change.

Once common causes are identified, remedy needs to address ongoing harm, impacts that have already occurred and conditions that could lead to recurrence. Adjusting equipment or work arrangements may improve future working conditions, while previously underpaid wages, unpaid social insurance contributions and pressure following grievances require corresponding action. In practice, different actions progress at different speeds, and measures implemented more quickly may become the focus of attention. Therefore, remedy plans should continue explaining which actions correspond to each rights claim, who is responsible for implementation and which issues remain unresolved, ensuring that common causes are addressed while specific harms also receive appropriate responses.

Connecting individual remedy and collective corrective action is another requirement for complete remedy. Determining who is affected by common rules and which work areas are covered by protection measures requires understanding workers' knowledge of production processes, workforce distribution and actual use conditions. Workers' views on proposed measures can help identify gaps, allowing investigation and corrective actions to extend beyond the original individual grievance.

Factories should implement collective measures based on this understanding, while brands should follow up on implementation.

Individual entitlements, historical losses and protection needs should continue to be addressed separately.

Analysing intersecting issues requires placing related concerns back into the same labour process. Understanding production, time records, wages, leaving procedures and workplace relationships helps explain why different rights impacts occur together and supports the design of connected remedy measures. A key lesson is to trace responsibility through the specific arrangements that caused harm, ensure corrective actions address common causes and keep each affected worker's remedy claim clear throughout implementation.



*Factory workers reading promotional materials about the Handshake Worker's Hotline.

Navigating Local Institutions and Fulfilling Responsibilities

The value of local institutional knowledge lies in transforming clearly defined rights claims into practical pathways for action. Addressing impacts experienced by workers requires further clarification of who holds relevant information, who has the authority to process matters, where obstacles arise in the process and what actions remain necessary. Registration, contribution payments, record issuance and benefit applications within social protection systems are often handled by different actors; changes in historical employment relationships may further fragment responsibilities and documentation. Understanding local systems and actual administrative processes helps distinguish disputes over responsibility, procedural barriers and failures of implementation, enabling the selection of appropriate approaches for advancing remedy.

Whether a particular pathway is suitable for workers also depends on the significance of these systems in their lives. Pension, illness and unemployment protection affect family arrangements and long-term expectations, while policy changes, levels of protection and administrative costs influence how workers understand payment of contribution arrears, waiting periods and further pursuit of claims. The experience accumulated through the LRN and by local professionals in language, local institutions and administrative procedures enables these factors to be incorporated into remedy discussions. In cross-border collaboration, space should be maintained for local teams to assess available pathways, allowing them to propose and adjust actions according to specific conditions and explain different options to workers.

When advancing action by multiple parties, responsibilities for adverse impacts and procedural roles need to be clarified separately. Factories are responsible for matters related to employment, workplace management, contributions and remuneration. A brand's responsibilities and actions should be assessed based on its specific relationship to the adverse impacts, including whether it caused, contributed to or was directly linked to the impacts through business relationships.[12]



*Factory workers reading promotional materials about the Handshake Worker's Hotline.

Suppliers, public institutions and service providers may each hold different information, authority and resources. Coordination therefore needs to identify what each party should and can do. When relevant parties participate in further investigation or administrative processes, it remains necessary to clearly identify who is responsible for the original harm and who is responsible for advancing outstanding remedy.

When one pathway can only address part of a worker's claims, coordination between different pathways also becomes part of the remedy strategy. Completed actions, remaining rights claims and possible next steps should be explained to workers. Where workers wish to continue pursuing their claims, they should be supported in understanding required documents, procedures and available assistance. The practical value of localisation lies in connecting available resources while maintaining clear responsibility, reducing the burden on workers of navigating between different actors and procedures alone, and continuously identifying which remedies remain unrealised.

Continuous Feedback and Strategy Adjustment

Remedy measures need to be tested through implementation. Changes in equipment, work processes, job roles and workplace relationships may alter previous assessments; even when an arrangement is incorporated into a policy, daily implementation may still be affected by other conditions. The purpose of continuous feedback is to understand whether measures have genuinely changed the conditions that caused harm and, based on this understanding, determine whether to continue implementation, conduct further investigation or adjust the approach. Follow-up priorities should evolve with unresolved issues, with particular attention to inconsistencies between factory reports and workers' experiences, gaps in collective measures and impacts arising from new arrangements.



*Our outreach staff introduced the Handshake Worker's Hotline to factory workers and encouraged them to use the service.

Workers' assessments of improvements are an important basis for understanding the practical meaning of remedy. What changes workers recognise, what difficulties they continue to experience and what they hope to address further should all inform subsequent decisions. At the same time, improvements in protection measures, payment of entitlements and remaining claims may progress at different stages; overall satisfaction needs to be understood alongside these specific outcomes. Continued engagement should help workers clearly understand how each claim is being handled and support their decisions on further participation. Factories and brands, meanwhile, need to provide clear responses and actions regarding responsibilities that have not yet been fulfilled.

Only when feedback is further incorporated into risk assessments, workplace rules and daily management can experiences from individual remedy contribute to preventing similar harms. The focus should be on identifying the conditions under which measures are effective, the factors that limit their effectiveness and why adjustments respond to the original issues. Clearly explaining these relationships enables other workplaces to assess which practices may be relevant to their own circumstances and which require further investigation, rather than directly replicating a specific piece of equipment or procedure.

Localised strategies need to be developed and refined through continued practice. Workers' experiences help identify issues, local knowledge explains the conditions in which they arise, clear responsibility relationships support implementation, and feedback from implementation tests assessments and approaches. Remedy pathways are gradually formed through these interactions. Their effectiveness depends on whether harm experienced by workers is reduced, whether workers receive the benefits due to them and whether the working conditions and relationships that create similar harms are changed.



*Our outreach staff introduced the Handshake Worker's Hotline to factory workers and encouraged them to use the service.

Conclusion

Advancing Worker-Centred Localised Remedy



Workplace Beyond Equity Within

Local engagement helps ensure that remedies are practical, acceptable and sustainable.

> Workers are rights-holders at the centre of remedy.

Workers are always rights-holders and participants in decisions directly related to their own remedy. This year's practice has enabled Inno to better understand how such participation influences remedy processes and outcomes: workers explain what they hope to change, provide input on investigations and proposed measures, raise concerns after measures are implemented, and decide how to continue asserting their rights based on their own circumstances. These views and choices help the team refine assessments and adjust actions. Workers' familiarity with daily operations and workplace relationships enables them to identify similar difficulties faced by colleagues, helping the team recognise broader issues and expand the scope of investigation and corrective action.

For worker participation to genuinely influence decisions, grievance mechanisms need to provide safe channels of communication, sufficient information and ongoing engagement. Local teams' understanding of language, culture, institutions and workplace relationships helps them recognise workers' concerns, as well as how income, employment positions and livelihood needs influence their choices. Based on this understanding, teams can discuss investigation approaches, protection arrangements and remedy measures with workers, and continue assessing the actual effects of measures after implementation. Workers' feedback enters the remedy process through these specific adjustments, while factories and brands need to fulfil their respective responsibilities and implement corresponding remedies.

The experiences discussed in this casebook have developed through such interactions and actions. Existing standards, professional knowledge and previous experience provide a basis for action; however, when responding to specific workplace situations, teams still need to make assessments based on workers' circumstances and adjust pathways according to implementation feedback. The concerns raised by workers, their evaluation of proposed measures and actual changes in working conditions continuously test and refine the team's understanding. Practice therefore becomes a process of generating knowledge and accumulating experience: worker participation influences current remedy while also providing important learning for future work.

This is why Inno remains committed to As Local As Possible: through continuous engagement on site and within local contexts, workers' experiences and choices can influence remedy, while understanding and approaches continue to be refined through practice. The effectiveness of remedy should ultimately be assessed through the actual changes experienced by workers: whether harm has been reduced, whether workers have received the remedy due to them, whether workers can continue asserting their rights safely, and whether the working conditions that create similar harms have been improved. Continued understanding of these changes and remaining challenges enables practical experience to inform future action and allows localisation strategies to continue developing in response to workers' needs.



*Our outreach staff introduced the Handshake Worker's Hotline to factory workers and encouraged them to use the service.



*Factory workers reading promotional materials about the Handshake Worker's Hotline.

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