

Complaint – Gerhard Rösch – Romania

Status: Investigation

FWF is responsible for setting up a complaints procedure in production countries where FWF is active. The complaints procedure allows third parties to make complaints about the working conditions or the way the Code of Labour Practices is implemented in factories which supply FWF members.

The responsibility of FWF includes investigating the complaint, verifying whether the agreed corrective action plan is implemented and public reporting. This complaint report gives an overview of a complaint filed to FWF, the investigation and agreed corrective action plan as well as how the outcome is verified. For more information on the complaints procedure see the FWF website. FWF also publishes an overview of complaints received in its annual reports.

1. Affiliate involved

Gerhard Rösch

2. Accused party

A factory located in Romania supplying Gerhard Rösch.

3. Date of receiving complaint

19 September 2014

4. The complaint

The complainants, currently employed by the factory, claimed that workers are (physically) restricted to leave the factory during working time. The workers can only exit the building using the stairs and the access way from the ground floor, where the management offices are located to leave the factory.

Complainants claim that: management of the company decided at a certain point to keep one of the two access doors locked during the working time on the first floor, as follows:

- the door is open in the morning to let workers enter and shortly afterwards the janitor locks it by key,
- the janitor opens the door when the lunch break starts and closes it immediately after workers return to work,
- the janitor opens the door when the work time ends for the employees to go home. As effect, during working time, the workers of the sewing section have access to toilets, but

no access to the locker rooms nor to the eating area unless all workers use the exit door and stairs which conduct directly to the offices.

The exit doors on the first floor are closed during working time. The keys of the exit doors are kept by the janitor. Workers don't feel free to express grievances with management. According to the complainants one of the workers who asked the janitor about the closed doors, was sanctioned.

5. Admissibility

FWF decided that the case is admissible on 19 September.

The factory is an active supplier of Gerhard Rösch, an affiliate of FWF.

The case is relevant to the following labour standards of FWF's Code of Labour Practices:

- Safe and Healthy working conditions (fire safety).

6. Investigation

FWF informed Gerhard Rösch about the case on 22 September. Gerhard Rösch contacted immediately the factory for more information.

Factory management confirmed the following:

One door to the staircase is closed from the sewing section. Two other exit doors are open and workers have never been locked totally. The reason behind the locked doors for factory management is to restrict workers from taking unofficial breaks and to clock out official. Workers are now forced to use the staircases which are visible for the management.

With this information FWF's complaints handler contacted the complainants. The complainants confirmed almost all points mentioned by the factory management. The complainant's response on factory management is as follows:

The complainants never declared that they are totally locked in the factory, but in case of emergency there are not enough exit routes. The two staircases open for workers are quite far away from certain working places.

The workers do not confirm that workers leave the factory without permits. Besides the lunch breaks, workers do leave their direct workplace to have a coffee, to make a phone call, grab something to eat, take a medicine, smoke or stretch their bodies within the factory premises.

Workers indicate the need for a short extra break in the morning and afternoon. They indicate the sewing operation is complex, highly intensive and requires focused attention to keep quality up standard and operate the machines safely. For this reason, they feel they need an extra short break away from the machines to rest/move/stretch.

The workers would prefer to have better rules in the factory on regular short morning and afternoon breaks. Workers would like to have better communication with the management and that factory management trusts their personnel.

7. Findings and conclusions

Recent audit findings confirmed health and safety issues, related to the complaint, which required immediate action. Factory confirmed with affiliate not all fire exit doors at 3rd floor are open. Based on the above investigation, confirmation by the factory and recent audit findings, FWF concluded the case was grounded.

8. Remediation

FWF requires Gerhard Rösch to make clear to the factory all exit doors need to be open during production. FWF highly recommends Gerhard Rösch to promote Workplace Education Program implementation at the factory, to stimulate dialogue between factory management and workers to be able to build trust and find solutions on problems together, specifically to agree on internal regulation on how to organize additional breaks.

9. Verification

Complaint has been solved according to the complainants. Gerhard Rösch has terminated FWF membership by which the mandate to verify the status of this complaint lapsed.

10. Evaluation by the complainant

Complaint is solved and closed.

Complainants have been called to check the status of the complaint. The complaints handler found out that the problem was solved: the doors are open again and the management stopped monitoring workers.