

Seeds of change for migrant workers in Taiwan's semiconductor plants



Factory:

Semiconductor plant “Factory A”

Location:

Taiwan

Image: Migrant worker photo of overcrowded dormitory

Migrant workers in Taiwan's semiconductor plants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Media coverage during the pandemic highlighted their poor living and working conditions, with the *Financial Times*, *Nikkei Asia* and the *Telegraph* reporting that migrant workers there were forbidden to leave their dormitories except to go to work. Taiwanese workers were not subject to any restrictions. This story describes challenges to monitoring labour rights in Taiwan's semiconductor plants and how Electronics Watch monitoring partner Serve the People Association (SPA) overcame them. After unsuccessful attempts at four other factories, SPA successfully established worker-driven monitoring at a fifth, referred to hereafter as Factory A.

Monitoring challenges and solutions

Taiwan produces over 60% of the world's semiconductors and over 90% of the most advanced ones,¹ giving the industry geopolitical importance alongside its economic significance for the country. The power of chip companies operating in Taiwan makes it challenging for workers to raise complaints.

Their precarious status makes migrant workers particularly reluctant to complain, as they fear reprisals and being sent back to their home country. They are at high risk of forced labour and debt bondage due to recruitment fees they are often forced to pay to secure jobs. For the same reason, they are unlikely to trust or speak to people and organisations they do not know.

Auditors and other external investigators cannot reliably obtain testimony about migrant workers' situations unless they can establish trust via a trade union, a former colleague or local rights advocate.

Like audits, worker-driven monitoring usually incorporates qualitative and quantitative methods to collect credible evidence about human rights issues. It puts workers' needs and perspectives first, seeks to protect workers from harm, and provides remedy when harm has occurred.

This differs from audits, which can be used for a variety of purposes and assess compliance across a range of different issues. Electronics Watch monitoring partners build relationships with and are trusted by the workers they interview. They operate independently of the industry they monitor to ensure there are no conflicts of interest.

As it had already developed relationships of trust with migrant workers, SPA was well-placed to begin worker-driven monitoring at semiconductor plants in Taiwan. Over the past six years, SPA has assisted more than 1,000 displaced migrant workers in Taiwan at shelters that provide temporary accommodation, legal advice, emergency resettlement, and support obtaining legal wages and compensation. It has built up a network of migrant workers who know and trust the organisation, including some who were willing to talk about their working conditions in a semiconductor plant that we will refer to as Factory A.

¹ *The Economist*, “Taiwan's dominance of the chip industry makes it more important”, 6 June 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/03/06/taiwans-dominance-of-the-chip-industry-makes-it-more-important> retrieved 26 November 2025.

Thanks to this established network, SPA successfully held individual interviews with nine Filipino migrant workers at Factory A. Even when they are willing to talk, workers have little time for interviews as 10-hour shifts are common. To mitigate this, SPA organised focus group discussions to more efficiently gather data from more workers, and visited worker dormitories. The dormitories were hot and overcrowded, with 6 -12 people per room. Taiwan is a subtropical country and workers reported that they were charged an inflated fee to use air conditioning. This was a significant and unexpected financial burden. There were not enough bathrooms for the number of workers, resulting in long queues.

SPA also reviewed documentary evidence, including workers' photos of their dormitories, their contracts, and payslips. Contracts state that the factory would provide free accommodation. However, payslips confirmed workers' reports that monthly dormitory fees were deducted from the wages of all interviewed, including those who do not live in the dormitories.

Accounting for these deductions, the affected workers were paid less than Taiwan's legal minimum monthly wage. In addition, migrant workers earned only 25 percent of the extra nightshift supplement paid to their Taiwanese coworkers.

The start of monitoring in semiconductor facilities is a significant step forward

Electronics Watch initiated remediation under the Terms of Engagement with the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) in January 2025. The RBA discussed Electronics Watch monitoring findings with the factory. The factory agreed with some of the findings and began planning for corrective action.

Semiconductors are central to a wide range of electronics products, including those procured by affiliates. It is the first time that Electronics Watch has been able to conduct worker driven monitoring in a semiconductor factory in Taiwan.

Key takeaways

Worker-driven monitoring works

Having overcome access issues through worker-driven monitoring, Electronics Watch and SPA were able to facilitate access to remedy for migrant workers at Factory A. This case is part of a larger issue in the industry, and for migrant workers in Taiwan's chip industry especially. To have impact at scale, chip companies need to establish trusted, accessible operational grievance mechanisms.

Building trust with workers is a long-term process for monitoring partners

SPA's ongoing work to support migrant workers in crisis laid the foundations of their monitoring work. Workers at Factory A already knew SPA, or knew of it from others, and knew they could trust it.

Rigorous triangulation produces credible evidence

Although the factory cited policies it had in place to mitigate risks, it has broadly accepted the monitoring findings. The interview and documentary evidence SPA gathered for Electronics Watch was strong enough to demonstrate the limitations of current policies.