

PLAYING WITH LABOUR RIGHTS

MUSIC PLAYER AND GAME CONSOLE MANUFACTURING IN CHINA

This is a summary of the report "Playing with Labour Rights: Music player and game console manufacturing in China; FinnWatch, SACOM and SOMO, March 2009.

Portable MP3 music players have revolutionised the way we listen to music. Video game consoles have become common in homes across the developed world. With a growing demand for these digital devices among young people, manufacturing has increased exponentially over the past few years. Yet for the young people in the developing world who make our electronic accessories, life is not much fun. In China, the world's largest producer of MP3 players and game consoles, many workers are denied their basic rights.



MAKE IT FAIR!

Most of the big brand electronics companies have adopted codes of conduct stating that workers' labour rights will be guaranteed. Yet makeITfair's research shows the reality looks very different. Moreover, anti-union activity in the sector makes it extremely difficult to improve the situation for workers. makeITfair urges the electronics companies to take responsibility for labour rights violations in their supply chain and work for immediate improvements.

NO FUN FOR WORKERS IN CHINA

makeITfair carried out one of the first investigations into working conditions in factories producing MP3 players and video game consoles. They examined four factories in the Guangdong Province of China that manufacture components for Apple, Microsoft, Motorola, Philips and Sony. The findings were alarming:

- >> **Exploiting young workers** All four factories hired 16 to 18 year old student interns for between a few months and a year. They were required to perform night shifts and overtime like regular workers. Because student interns are not entitled to standard social insurance (except occupational accident insurance), they are cheaper for employers.
- >> **Contract labour** An increasing trend for contracting out temporary work through agencies is also further eroding workers' rights. Temporary workers have fewer benefits than their permanent colleagues and their wages are often deducted by labour agencies.
- >> **Low wages** Workers are not able to cover basic living costs with the wages they earn for a normal working day. Many workers are forced to live in cramped dormitories to save costs, often sharing a bathroom between dozens of people.
- >> **Excessive overtime** Workers are forced to take on excessive overtime in order to make ends meet. In the factories makeITfair examined, workers were employed for up to 120 hours overtime per month – a gross violation of Chinese labour law.
- >> **Health and safety** All four factories required workers to work month-long day and night shifts often lasting 11 hours. Two factories out of four required assembly line workers to stand throughout the shift. Some workers reported inhaling toxic fumes and feeling nauseous in soldering sections.
- >> **Punitive fines** At one factory workers toiled for 11 hours per day, six days per week – yet they were fined if they fell asleep at work. Wage deductions due to punitive fines were used in three out of four of the factories.

IF YOU WANT TO READ MAKEITFAIR'S REPORT ON WORKING
CONDITIONS IN MP3 PLAYER AND GAME CONSOLE FACTORIES,
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