



# What's changed for Syrian refugees in Turkish garment supply chains?

A survey & analysis of company action to address exploitation & abuse



**Business & Human Rights  
Resource Centre**

# CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	1
<b>Ranking Table</b> .....	3
<b>1. Company Survey</b> .....	4
Methodology.....	5
<b>2. Context</b> .....	6
<b>3. Survey Findings</b> .....	9
Policy on employment of Syrian refugees.....	9
Auditing, monitoring & undeclared subcontracting.....	11
Action taken when refugees are identified.....	15
Capacity building & cascading standards through suppliers.....	17
Stakeholder engagement.....	19
<b>4. Conclusions</b> .....	21
<b>5. Recommendations</b> .....	22

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An estimated 650,000 Syrian refugees have escaped bloodshed in their home country and found a lifeline working in Turkey, many of them in the garment industry.<sup>1</sup> Without these jobs, many families would face a desperate existence with limited help available elsewhere, including from many European countries. But the garment industry in Turkey is complex, and exploitative conditions are too common. Since 2015, a steady flow of reports and investigations have exposed poor wages, discrimination, and child labour by Syrian refugees working in the Turkish garment industry, including in some factories that produce goods for European high street brands. A recent study by academics from Istanbul University revealed that women refugee workers in the apparel sector are still being paid half the minimum wage.<sup>2</sup>

There is a growing group of leading brands taking targeted and thoughtful steps to ensure that refugee-workers are not exploited. In our survey, brands who had previously demonstrated best practice, like **Next** and **New Look**, have been joined by brands that have improved their approach, like **ASOS**, **Inditex**, **Otto Group** and **SuperGroup**. However, there is still a disappointingly large group of laggards that have not adapted their policies or practices to address the complexity and level of risk in Turkey. **Aldi**, **Arcadia Group**, **Asda** and **LC Waikiki** only provided minimal information with little evidence of action to stop exploitation of refugees. Six brands failed to respond to our survey altogether: **KiK**, **Mexx**, **New Yorker**, **River Island**, **s. Oliver** and **VF Corp**.

[We have tracked the situation in Turkey since](#)

late 2015, regularly asking big apparel brands what they are doing to curb possible exploitation in their supply chain. This report builds on analysis from February 2016 and October 2016. We approached 37 brands with a set of questions on their actions to protect Syrian refugees in their supply chains, and in July and August 2017 we visited Turkey to assess recent developments and speak to people on the ground.

In this third survey, almost twice as many brands could point to a specific policy they have adopted that guides suppliers on employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey and prohibits discrimination and exploitation. Leading brands have also increased and strengthened their auditing of suppliers in Turkey. Most of these brands also reported an increase in the number of refugee workers identified in their supply chains, a crucial first step to ending abuse.

Brands taking little meaningful action should improve and learn quickly from their peers' best practice highlighted in this report. This includes: identify risks of abuse in the long and complex supply chains they have established, robust due diligence plans to eliminate abuse and promote non-discrimination, dialogue with workers' and refugee organizations, and grievance and remedy mechanisms to put right the wrongs that are identified. There are major opportunities for both incremental and transformative reform, particularly to address systemic issues in the garment industry.

Undeclared subcontracting is a persistent issue for brands that source from Turkey, which threatens their ability to identify potentially vulnerable workers. Some leading

1. INGEV (2017). Suriyeli Mülteci Hayatlar Monitörü, p.2 <http://ingev.org/kutuphane/ingev-raporlar/suriyeli-multeci-hayatlar-monitoru-degerlendirme/>; Erdoğan, M. ve Ünver, C. (2015). Türk İş Dünyasının Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler Konusundaki Görüş Beklentisi ve Önerileri, TİSK Yayınları, No:353, Kasım 2015, p.45; FTA-BSCI Guidance Document (2017). Syrian Nationals Working in Turkish Supply Chains, [https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey\\_FINAL\\_ENG.PDF](https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey_FINAL_ENG.PDF); Fair Wear Foundation, (2017), Guidance on risks related to Turkish garment factories employing Syrian refugees. p.2.

2. Erol, Ertan; Akyol, Ayla Ezgi; Salman, Cema et.al. (2017) Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Türkiye'de Emek Piyasasına Dahil Olma Süreçleri ve Etkileri: İstanbul Tekstil Sektörü Örneği, Birleşik Metal İş Yayınları, Haziran 2017; INGEV (2017). Suriyeli Mülteci Hayatlar Monitörü, <http://ingev.org/kutuphane/ingev-raporlar/suriyeli-multeci-hayatlar-monitoru-degerlendirme/>; Kaya, A. ve Kirac, A. (2016) Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, Hayata Destek Derneği Yayınları; Support to Life (2016). Child Labour in Turkey: Situation of Syrian Refugees and the Search for Solutions Conference Report.



brands are building open and supportive relationships with first tier suppliers that go beyond compliance, so they can understand where vulnerable workers in their supply chain are. If accompanied by meaningful dialogue with workers, this can be effective in tackling abuse.

The increased positive action we have

catalogued from brands since late 2015 demonstrates their commitment to providing decent work for Syrian and Turkish workers alike. The worst thing brands could do is stop sourcing from Turkey, either because of the increased scrutiny on supply chains or challenging political climate. This would only result in lost opportunities for both refugees and host communities.

## Key recommendations:

### Identify refugees and bring them into formal employment:

- Brands should work individually and collectively to identify key human rights risks for Syrian refugees by conducting deep-dive risk assessments throughout their shared supply chains.
- Brands should communicate and implement a clear human rights due diligence plan to ensure workers are protected from exploitation and can access work under equal conditions at their suppliers' facilities. Particular attention should be paid to the unique risks faced by women refugees.
- Brands' commercial expectations and requirements should be based on deeper collaboration with their suppliers who should receive incentives and support to legalise the employment of undocumented Syrian refugees.

### Change purchasing practices:

- Brands need to change their purchasing practices to avoid encouraging an environment of abuse. Brands should set up pre-competitive collaboration, to ensure their collective buying practice and price points support the rights, including minimum wage, of all workers in their supply chains, learning from the ACT initiative.
- They should also ensure coherence between ethical and purchasing departments, and establish an open dialogue with suppliers regarding reasonable purchasing practice.

### Work collaboratively to tackle shared issues:

- Brands should expand efforts to individually and collectively support the work of local NGOs, trade unions and refugee support groups and explore ways to ensure worker participation. These groups can be key to designing effective solutions.
- Brands should join pre-competitive collaboration to strengthen the industry-level approach to end informal and child labour, and improve working conditions especially for refugees and immigrants.
- Diverse industry stakeholders should collaborate to build constructive dialogue with the Turkish Government to improve the work permit regulation, and support coherence between ministries' refugee policy and practice, and strengthen the capacity of the Turkish Labour Agency (ISKUR). They can also engage with European countries and the EU to insist on enhanced support for refugees in Turkey and the EU.

	COMPANY	Policy	Audits	Remedy	Capacity Building	Engagement
Leaders	ASOS	●	●	●	●	●
	= Inditex	●	●	●	●	●
	New Look	●	●	●	●	●
	NEXT	●	●	●	●	●
	= Otto Group	●	●	●	●	●
	= SuperGroup	●	●	●	●	●
	C&A	●	●	●	●	●
	= Esprit	●	●	●	●	●
	= H&M	●	●	●	●	●
	= Marks & Spencer	●	●	●	●	●
= Primark	●	●	●	●	●	
Adidas Group	●	●	●	●	●	
= White Stuff	●	●	●	●	●	
Burberry	●	●	●	●	●	
= Tchibo	●	●	●	●	●	
= Tesco	●	●	●	●	●	
Gerry Weber	●	●	●	●	●	
Debenhams	●	●	●	●	●	
= GAP	●	●	●	●	●	
= G-Star	●	●	●	●	●	
= Lidl	●	●	●	●	●	
= Mothercare	●	●	●	●	●	
= Nike	●	●	●	●	●	
= Sainsbury's	●	●	●	●	●	
HUGO BOSS	●	●	●	●	●	
= Monsoon	●	●	●	●	●	
= PUMA	●	●	●	●	●	
Aldi	●	●	●	●	●	
= LC Waikiki	●	●	●	●	●	
Arcadia Group	●	●	●	●	●	
Asda	●	●	●	●	●	
Non-responders	KiK	●	●	●	●	●
	Mexx	●	●	●	●	●
	New Yorker	●	●	●	●	●
	River Island	●	●	●	●	●
	s. Oliver	●	●	●	●	●
	VF Corp.	●	●	●	●	●

● Leading practice ● Good practice ● Should seek to improve efforts ● No information provided  
 = Company is equal level to the company/companies immediately above it

We ranked brands' responses based on: quality of the responses and detail of information provided; examples of best policies and practice including clear strategies to protect Syrian refugees and facilitate access to work in supply chains; and examples of progress over the years to prevent, address, mitigate and protect from risks of discrimination and exploitation. Companies with the same scores are ranked in alphabetical order in the table.

# COMPANY SURVEY

In August 2017, we invited 37<sup>3</sup> European high street clothing brands to respond to a survey of their actions to address the exploitation of Syrian refugees in the Turkish garment industry. The questionnaire included 20 questions covering five core themes:

- » *policy; auditing, monitoring, and undeclared subcontracting; remedy and actions taken when refugees are identified; capacity building and cascading standards through supply tiers; and stakeholder engagement*

This is the third such survey we have issued to brands - the first was in late 2015, the second in July 2016. This year we revised the questions to reflect the current context, while keeping the structure similar to allow comparison with previous years. You can view the 2017 survey [here](#).

29 brands responded to the full questionnaire. These were:

- 24 brands that responded in 2016: **Adidas, Aldi, ASOS, C&A, Debenhams, Esprit, G-Star, GAP, H&M, HUGO BOSS, Inditex, LC Waikiki, Marks & Spencer, Monsoon, Mothercare, New Look, NEXT, Nike, Otto Group, Primark, PUMA, Tchibo, Tesco and White Stuff**
- 5 brands that responded to the survey for the first time: **Burberry, Gerry Weber, Lidl, Sainsbury's and Supergroup**

Two brands sent general statements: **Arcadia Group** and **Asda**.

Six brands did not respond: **KiK** (responded in 2016), **Mexx, New Yorker, River Island, s.Oliver**, and **VF Corp**.

Overall there was an increase in survey responses from brands from 26 in July 2016, to 29 in August 2017. We are pleased that more brands provided full and detailed answers, including the five that had not previously responded or had only sent short statements in the past.

The quality of answers varied. Several brands have developed clear policies and strategies sensitive to the vulnerability and needs of Syrian refugees to access formal and decent employment, in order to address exploitation in their supply chains. These brands stand out for the leading practices they have developed over the years. The level of disclosure in brands' responses, however, remains generally shallow and generic. Many low-ranking brands still do not take preventive measures and rely on general policies of non-discrimination and respect for labour rights. These brands need to take urgent steps to improve their responses to the situation and broader human rights due diligence. We are disappointed by the lack of minimum transparency of the major supermarket **Asda** and the six brands which have not responded, including major garment brands **KiK, Mexx, New Yorker, River Island, s.Oliver** and **VF Corp**.

<sup>3</sup> This is one less brand from last year. We did not include Vaude in this survey because they no longer have suppliers in Turkey.

# METHODOLOGY AND WHY RESPONSES HAVE BEEN ANONYMISED

The high street brands surveyed were initially selected through purposeful sampling to provide an overview of what European-headquartered brands with supply chain operations in Turkey are doing to address the situation of Syrian refugees. The size of these brands' supply chains and the time they have been established in Turkey vary. Some are members and have worked with multi-stakeholder initiatives including Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Foreign Trade Association (FTA) to develop projects and guidance on the risk of exploitation of Syrian refugees. Differences in the depth of understanding, engagement and development of policies and practices were an expected outcome but serve to highlight where improvements are required. For each survey, we sent brands questionnaires to complete and return via email. The data from each returned questionnaire was analysed and compared with previous answers to the last surveys and between brands' responses to identify individual and common areas of best practice, improvement and poor practice.

Unlike our previous reports, the responses to this survey have been anonymised in the report, and we are not publishing them on our website this year. We are, however, ranking brands' responses to the five core themes, as explained above. We decided on this approach because companies expressed concern that revealing what they are doing to protect refugees while legalising refugees' status could be interpreted as unlawful under Turkish labour law and result in pressure on suppliers that employ refugees. Our decision to anonymise the results followed consultations with brands as well as NGOs.

## 2. CONTEXT

This section of the briefing is informed by fieldwork conducted in July and August 2017 in Turkey to assess recent developments, shed light on the perceptions and expectations of the local industry stakeholders and evaluate company action so far. In-depth interviews were conducted with employer associations, trade unions, NGOs, former CSR staff of international brands, government officials, the UNDP and refugees who work in NGOs dealing with labour market integration of refugees in Istanbul and Ankara.

### Syrian Refugee Workers in Turkey and persistent structural issues in the garment industry

No analysis can start without first recognizing that the Turkish people and Government have accepted over 3 million Syrian refugees<sup>4</sup> into their country, recognizing their plight as they flee conflict and persecution. This stands in stark contrast to the record of almost all European countries.

Nearly two years after our initial report on the exploitation of refugee workers in the Turkish garment industry, the situation has evolved considerably. Nevertheless, while it has become easier for a small number of Syrian refugees to be incorporated safely and fairly into the apparel and other key industries in Turkey, the situation for the vast majority appears to remain precarious.

The possibility for Syrian refugees to secure Turkish work permits has provided a legal avenue for brands to permit contractors in their supply chains to openly employ Syrian refugees, and for refugees to defend their rights to basic workplace safety and a living wage. By the end of 2016 (the first year such permits were authorized), 13,298 work permits were issued to Syrian refugees. Unofficial figures state that more than 9,000 permits were issued in the first half of 2017, which increases the total number to over 20,600.<sup>5</sup> While this suggests that employers may be increasingly willing to work through the legal process to employ refugees, these permits still represent only a small fraction of the working refugee population. The manufacturing sector, including the garment industry, employs a large part of the 650,000 Syrian refugees working formally and informally in the country, but fewer than 2,500 permits were issued for this sector in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

The garment industry alone is estimated to employ more than 1 million formal<sup>7</sup> and 1 million informal workers<sup>8</sup> in Turkey, including hundreds of thousands of refugees. Refugees we interviewed cited a number of barriers to formal employment, including: restrictions on their ability to transfer their registration to a new city when they find a job there; misunderstandings within companies about how to go about legally registering a refugee; refugees' perception that employers prefer to employ informal workers at a lower wage than formal workers; and lack of adequate capacity for İŞKUR, the state employment agency, to act as an intermediary between employers and refugees.

4. The total number of Syrians under temporary protection is 3.235.992 (number correct as of 12/10/2017), [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-korumaya\\_363\\_378\\_4713\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-korumaya_363_378_4713_icerik).

5. Faruk Kaymakci, 'Turkey to Europe: We did our part, now you do yours – Ankara pulled Europe out of the migration crisis. But the bloc hasn't upheld its end of the bargain', Politico 13/10/2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-to-europe-we-did-our-part-now-you-do-yours/>.

6. INGEV (2017). Suriyeli Mülteci Hayatlar Monitörü, p.2 <http://ingev.org/kutuphane/ingev-raporlar/suriyeli-multeci-hayatlar-monitoru-de-gerlendirme/>; Erdoğan, M. ve Ünver, C. (2015). Türk İş Dünyasının Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler Konusundaki Görüş Beklentisi ve Önerileri, TİSK Yayınları, No:353, Kasım 2015, p.45; FTA-BSCI Guidance Document (2017). Syrian Nationals Working in Turkish Supply Chains, [https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey\\_FINAL\\_ENG.PDF](https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey_FINAL_ENG.PDF); Anadolu Agency (2017) 'Turkey issues work permits to over 73,500 foreigners', 18 Ocak, <http://aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkey-issues-work-permits-to-over-73-500-foreigners/729836.7>. The total number of workers at textile, apparel and leather in July 2017 is 1.005.855 according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, <https://www.csqb.gov.tr/media/5605/2017-temmuz-ayi-istatistigi.pdf>

8. Dogan, N. and Palamutcu, S. (2013) 'Tekstil ve Hazır Giyim Sektöründe Nitelikli İş Gücü Yetiştirme Programları', 2023e 10 kula 3. Sanayi Surasi, TC Bilim, Sanayi ve Teknoloji Bakanlığı.



Workers without permits often find ad-hoc or daily work through family, friends and social networks, including effective use of social media to find lower tier factories that will employ them according to demand. Lower tier factories are subcontracted to produce garments or parts of garments that are delivered to tier 1 factories. Such factories, unlike tier 1 factories, often tend not to have a direct relationship with the brands they are producing for, and may not be subject to as many social and labour audits.

The Turkish garment industry has evolved to deliver goods quickly and flexibly for European high street brands, and is under continual pressure to do so. This pressure leads to the use of undeclared subcontracting, informal work arrangements and low wages to deliver, all of which create an exploitative environment for vulnerable workers of all kinds. Flexibility and speed in delivery are possible thanks to a network of tens of thousands of factories with fewer than 100 employees. These factories draw on a vast pool of both formal and informal workers who work side by side. They primarily produce garments for a large informal market, as well as serving as excess capacity to produce for organised retail and export to foreign markets. These factories do not have the same ethical compliance requirements as suppliers working for foreign brands, which set standards. Tier 1 factories use and frequently change subcontractors to meet demand and fast turnover orders. This high turnover makes the mapping of lower tier suppliers particularly difficult and requires continuous monitoring by brands to prevent undeclared subcontracting. Furthermore, addressing undeclared subcontracting and tackling informality through policies poses a real conundrum: how can brands build the security of workers through formalisation of employment without undermining the competitive edge of an industry that provides employment to millions of workers?

Informal employment typically carries more risks than formal employment. Many other organizations have reported on the poor conditions, low wages (generally less than the minimum wage) and long hours Syrian refugees frequently encounter in the informal garment sector. Unregistered workers are often given night shifts and weekend work so that they remain hidden from auditors. Some employers prefer to employ refugee children instead of adults because they are perceived to be able to learn the job and language quickly, and be less likely to protest working conditions. A recent study by academics from Istanbul University found that a typical male Syrian textile worker in Istanbul earns approximately 1,000-1,100 Turkish Lira (TL) per month, and a female Syrian textile worker earns around 700 TL per month, while the minimum wage is 1,404 TL per month.<sup>9</sup>

### Action by brands

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre began tracking action by brands to address exploitation of Syrian refugees in late 2015. Our previous reports revealed a gulf in efforts between a few leading brands, such as **NEXT** and **New Look**, which were taking targeted steps to eliminate refugee exploitation, and a long tail of laggard brands that had failed to take substantial action in this area. However, over the last three years, more garment brands have begun to take welcome steps to safeguard refugee workers.

Some international garment brands operating in Turkey have increasingly engaged with local stakeholders to address the challenges associated with refugee employment, and these efforts have been well-received by local NGOs and workers' organizations.

---

9. Erol, Ertan; Akyol, Ayla Ezgi; Salman, Cema et.al. (2017) Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Türkiye'de Emek Piyasasına Dahil Olma Süreçleri ve Etkileri: İstanbul Tekstil Sektörü Örneği, Birleşik Metal İş Yayınları, Haziran 2017; INGEV (2017). Suriyeli Mülteci Hayatlar Monitörü, <http://ingev.org/kutuphane/ingev-raporlar/suriyeli-multeci-hayatlar-monitoru-degerlendirme/>; Kaya, A. ve Kirac, A. (2016) Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, Hayata Destek Derneği Yayınları; Support to Life (2016). Child Labour in Turkey: Situation of Syrian Refugees and the Search for Solutions Conference Report.

Brands, local suppliers, and organizations dealing with refugees have also engaged in multi-stakeholder initiatives to help address the challenges of refugee employment, such as the programmes and projects of multi-stakeholder groups including [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#), [Fair Labor Association \(FLA\)](#), [Fair Wear Foundation \(FWF\)](#), and [Foreign Trade Association \(FTA\)](#)'s Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI). These initiatives provide a platform for dialogue and decision-making among these diverse actors. This is a significant positive development since our first report in 2016. Targeted action from brands has been crucial, although the tangible impact of such initiatives is yet to be felt in many factories. In particular, our research suggests that, within these efforts, refugee voices may be limited by the fact that only the few who have legal and formal employment can participate in Turkish trade unions, which play a critical role in these initiatives.

The refugee crisis is exceptional and needs a tailored response from business. However, the rise in refugees seeking work in Turkey has also exposed structural problems in the garment industry that are not unique to Turkey or to refugee workers. Local Turkish textile and apparel employer associations, which represent the factories used to produce the majority of the goods sold to brands, point to the purchasing practices of global brands as a limiting action to protect refugee workers.

### Political developments since July 2016

It is critical to recognize the political developments that have taken place in Turkey over the past year, and their impact on the situation for Syrian refugees seeking employment. The failed coup attempt in July 2016 and the subsequent state of emergency has resulted in a high turnover of government officials, including those responsible for dealing with refugee employment issues. It has also led to the closing of some NGOs operating in this area, such as International Middle East Peace Research Centre (IMPR) and Mercy Corps. Such signals from the government could deter global brands from cooperating with civil society groups representing Syrian refugees (or Turkish workers), hindering a dialogue that has been fruitfully expanding.

This risk analysis is crucial to understand the political and economic climate that affects the labour market for refugees. Although projects and programmes of MSIs geared at employing refugees have the active participation of all stakeholders – thus creating synergy in the Turkish textile-apparel industry – such risks might have an adverse effect on the decisions taken by stakeholders to deal with refugees in future.

### Applying for a work permit

In January 2016, the Turkish government adopted a new law allowing Syrian refugees under temporary protection who have been in Turkey for more than six months to apply for a work permit. Under the new system:

- Applicants for work permits must first register for temporary protection identification cards. There is a six-month waiting period between receipt of the temporary protection identification card and eligibility to apply for a work permit.
- Work permits are issued at the request of an employer prior to signing an employment contract with an employee, and refugees must be treated on an equal basis with local workers.
- Employers must file for the permit on behalf of the employee via [www.turkiye.gov.tr](http://www.turkiye.gov.tr) or [www.calismaizni.gov.tr](http://www.calismaizni.gov.tr). There is a maximum refugee workplace quota of 10%, meaning the share of refugees in any given workplace cannot exceed 10% of its total workforce. An annual fee of 558 Turkish Lira/€135 per worker must be paid for registration.
- Work permits are valid for the same city (or in some cases province) where the identification card was issued. Refugees must work in the city they registered. If they find a job in a different city, then they must re-register in that city and ask their new employer to apply for a work permit on their behalf.

## 3. 2017 SURVEY FINDINGS

This section reviews the brands' responses and focuses on five practice and issue areas: *policy; auditing, monitoring, and undeclared subcontracting; remedy and actions taken when refugees are identified; capacity building and cascading standards through supply tiers; and stakeholder engagement*. Each section provides examples of policies and practice that need improvement and highlight elements of best practice revealed in the survey.

Overall, there are welcome signs of progress from a majority of brands. However, given the reported persistent discrimination and abuse of Syrian refugees in supply chains, the enhanced policies and practice of brands now need to be systematically embedded in their purchasing practices and communications. Only in this way will these welcome advances transform the brands' human rights performance in Turkey and enhance the conditions of the majority of refugee workers who do not have work permits. A small number of brands appear to be substantially further along this path than the majority.

### 3.1. Policy on employment of Syrian refugees

We asked brands if they had a specific policy prohibiting discrimination against and exploitation of Syrian refugees, and if so, how they communicate it to their suppliers in Turkey.

Companies which	2016	2017
Have a policy or position specifically prohibiting discrimination & exploitative practices against Syrian refugees, inc. guidance communication to suppliers	9	15
Circulate policies to suppliers via contractual agreement or letter	13	26
Provide specific training to suppliers	7	16

A year on from our last survey, almost twice as many brands were able to point to a specific policy that prohibits discrimination and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Turkey and outlines expectations that suppliers facilitate and legally employ them. Of these fifteen brands with standalone policies, three of them had not responded fully last year. One leading brand shared its 'Refugee Due Diligence Policy' which details its risk assessment procedure, including instructions for its auditors on the questions to ask and the issues they should look out for when carrying out the risk assessment in factories.

The majority of companies (17) pointed to general policies on discrimination and/or migrant workers. These policies do cover some of the critical issues for refugees in many host countries that can lead to or constitute forms of exploitation and forced labour (e.g. absence of employment contracts and terms and conditions; control of passports and identification documents; coercion and denunciation to authorities; lower, delayed or absence of salary or penalties against wage; excessive working hours; unhealthy or unsafe accommodation or workplaces; forced overtime; etc.)

For example, one respondent stressed the importance of treating employees equally, saying that:

» *These principles apply to all workers in our supply chain and therefore it is not necessary to have a separate policy for any specific workers be they migrant or refugee as all workers must be only employed in the same conditions as the other workers.*

While such general policies are welcome, they may not be robust enough to respond to the specific challenges and situation of refugees in Turkey,<sup>10</sup> which, as noted by another respondent, “requires extra monitoring and attention in the garment supply chain.” In particular, brands need to grapple with the complication of their subcontractors potentially employing Syrian refugees who may not be registered or have current work permits. They also must tackle discriminatory treatment between Syrian refugee men and women workers. As noted above, undocumented and informally employed Syrian refugee women reportedly often take home around 700 TL per month; they earn a third less than their male counterparts, or half the legal minimum wage 1,404 TL per month.

Following the example of leading brands, such general policies should be complemented by a policy which, at minimum:

- Emphasises that the employment of Syrian refugees in supply chains is welcome and that employers should help them legalise their situation (where required) and ensure their continued equal employment;
- Provides a clear action plan that sets out processes through which employers can help Syrian refugees legalise their situation by registering and obtaining work permits;
- Makes clear that local employers will not be penalised if they notify brands about undocumented Syrian refugees employed in their factories, and in fact will receive support for effective remediation as described above;
- Emphasises that Syrian refugee men and women must be employed under equal conditions;
- Is regularly updated to account for changes in the law and to emulate best practice.

A minority of brands state in their policies that they only accept Syrian refugees who can be legally employed (i.e. who are already registered and have a work permit that enables them to work in the city where the factory is located). These brands act in compliance with the law, but their policy ignores the fact that only employers can apply for work permits on behalf of Syrian refugees. Given the widespread issue of informal Syrian workers in garment factories in Turkey, these brands could instead adopt the approach of leading companies, which encourages suppliers that have hired informal workers to declare them and provide them with the necessary assistance to obtain work permits with the objective to continue legal employment under equal conditions.

Most brands (26) – even those without a standalone policy or action plan on Syrian refugees – demonstrated that they had communicated their position on the employment of Syrian refugees to their suppliers. Usually they do so through contractual agreements, and seek their suppliers’ commitment to ethical policies, which they then verify during audits. Sixteen brands report having organised special trainings and conferences for their suppliers on this issue and/or stated that they plan to do so in the future. Four of them also linked their approach to Syrian refugees in Turkey to their training and the reporting on modern slavery required under the Transparency in Supply Chains Clause of the UK Modern Slavery Act.

10. The [Dhaka Principles for migration with dignity](#) emphasise the importance of having specific policies which address the particular issues confronting migrant and refugees workers in the countries where companies have supply chains.



### 3.2. Auditing, monitoring & undeclared subcontracting

We asked companies about their audit and monitoring processes, including how they address the risk of undeclared sub-contracting by their suppliers in Turkey and evaluate the impact of their purchasing practices on the capacity of their suppliers to comply with ethical standards. We also asked them whether they had identified any adult or child Syrian refugees in their supply chains, and if they had Arabic speakers in their audit team to carry out confidential interviews.

#### 3.2.a. Auditing & monitoring process

Companies which	2016	2017
Conducted unannounced audits in Tier 1	1	9
Conducted unannounced audits in Tier 2 & 3	3	9
Have an Arabic speaker in the audit team or hire the translator	14	24
Identified adult Syrian refugees (with or without work permits) in its supply chains	11	18
Identified Syrian refugee children in its supply chains	2	2

Eighteen brands this year reported they had found adult Syrian refugees in their supply chains. One brand with strong disclosure policies and remedial practices, and which conducts unannounced audits through its entire supply chain, identified more than 130 Syrian refugees. The company worked with suppliers to secure work permits for these workers. Three brands reported having suppliers who hired refugees who already had permits. Two brands detected Syrian refugee children in their factories. We welcome this transparency by a greater number of brands to engage and communicate with suppliers on this issue.

The number of Syrian refugees identified in factories is still surprisingly low, given how many refugees are thought to be working in the industry. The small number of Syrian refugee children identified is also surprising given that child labour is a known widespread risk in the garment sector in Turkey, and there have been recent reports of Syrian refugee children found working in garment factories and workshops in Istanbul and Gaziantep.<sup>11</sup>

11. Laura Pitel, 'A day on the factory floor for a young refugee', Financial Times 20 Sept 2017; Culpan, R. & Ekin, C. (2009). "A strategic analysis of Turkish firms in the apparel industry". International Journal of Globalization and Small Business, 3, 160–181; Dogan, N. and Palamutcu, S. (2013) 'Tekstil ve Hazır Giyim Sektöründe Nitelikli İş Gücü Yetiştirme Programları', 2023e 10 kala 3. Sanayi Surasi, TC Bilim, Sanayi ve Teknoloji Bakanlığı. Erol, Ertan; Akyol, Ayla Ezgi; Salman, Cema et.al. (2017) Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Türkiye'de Emek Piyasasına Dahil Olma Süreçleri ve Etkileri: İstanbul Tekstil Sektörü Örneği, Birleşik Metal İş Yayınları, Haziran 2017. Eurofound (2013) 'Tackling undeclared work in Turkey', Dublin: Eurofound.; FTA-BSCI Guidance Document (2017). Syrian Nationals Working in Turkish Supply Chains, [https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey\\_FINAL\\_ENG.PDF](https://business-humanrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/Guidance-Documents-Syrians-in-Turkey_FINAL_ENG.PDF), Şubat 2017, Erişim Tarihi 01/09/2017; İçduygu, A. and Millet, E. (2016) 'Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Insecure Lives in an Environment of Pseudo-Integration. Global Turkey in Europe', Global Turkey in Europe Working Paper No. 13, Available at: [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte\\_wp\\_13.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte_wp_13.pdf); MacIntyre, D. (2016) Panorama - Undercover: The Refugees Who Make Our Clothes, BBC, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/aboutthebbc/entries/aa0dd313-e50a-4e28-8109-118a7cc3b3df>; Tutuncu, A. and Zengin, H. (2016) 'Türkiye'de Kayıtdışı Ekonominin Boyutunun Tahmini', Doğu Üniversitesi Dergisi, 17(2): 195–209.

This would suggest that the auditing and monitoring processes put in place by most companies are still inadequate to identify and monitor such risks. As we observed in our previous briefing, the lack of oversight beyond tier 1, the prevalence of announced and semi-announced audits, and the delegation of the responsibility to communicate standards and conduct ethical assessments of subcontractors to tier 1 suppliers are not sufficient to detect serious compliance issues. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that most brands that conducted regular unannounced audits, including in factories in tiers 2 and 3, reported having detected Syrian refugees without permits in factories.

As in previous surveys, the majority of audits still focus on tier 1 suppliers, with limited oversight over tiers 2 and 3. Many brands emphasised that they delegate the responsibility to audit, assess and monitor sub-contractors in tiers 2 and 3 to their 1st tier suppliers. Since tier 1 suppliers are less likely to employ refugees, this resulted in few identified Syrian refugees in these brands' supply chains.

Nevertheless, some leading brands are adapting their audit and monitoring practices to address the presence of Syrian refugees in their supply chains. Twenty-two brands responded that they have Arabic speakers in their audit teams or are ready to hire translators from NGOs working with Syrian refugees when required. Two brands said they have recruited or are recruiting Syrian nationals who know the culture and language and understand the experience of Syrian refugees on their Turkey-based team. Another described that they use assessment forms in Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish, which workers confidentially fill in during audits.

Eleven brands have mapped all their Turkish suppliers to get a deeper and clearer understanding of their complex supply chains and published a list or a map on their website. One leading brand explained that they had gone through this mapping exercise to meet their obligations under the Transparency in Supply Chains Clause of the UK Modern Slavery Act. Two brands reported having significantly increased their team in Turkey to ensure better monitoring of their supply chain and regular engagement with their suppliers. One brand explained that, following stakeholder consultations, they had moved to unannounced night audits in tiers 2 and 3 of their Turkish supply chain, as undocumented Syrian refugees are more likely to work night shifts.

One brand gave a detailed overview of the supplier self-assessment mechanism they have started to use. It requires trust building with suppliers, and the capacity to deploy teams to monitor factories where red flags are raised in suppliers' self-assessment. This mechanism has the advantage of encouraging dialogue and collaboration between brands and their suppliers. This same brand also highlighted the importance of improving workplace dialogue and industrial relations through Global Framework Agreements (GFA) with international trade unions and partnerships with the ETI group on workplace dialogue. These initiatives complement their supplier self-assessment model.

As noted in our previous briefing, collaborative models in which workers and their local representatives lead in identifying risks and developing standards and are able to engage with employers and brands (which support capacity building to ensure compliance) are welcome developments. However, such models might be difficult to implement in situations where informal employment prevails and where workers are not organised or represented by local trade unions, as is the case of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Furthermore, mechanisms which devolve all compliance and assessment responsibility to tier 1 suppliers – in principle to empower them and give them ownership of ethical and sustainable compliance – also risk displacing brands' responsibility without considering the capacity needs of suppliers, because the approach is still treated as a matter of compliance.

### 3.2.b. Undeclared subcontracting and reviewing purchasing practices

As noted above, a large majority of undocumented Syrian refugees do not work in 1st tier suppliers, but are in fact mostly found working for usually undeclared tiers 2 and 3 subcontractors.<sup>12</sup> Turkish manufacturers report that pressure from brands for cheap and rapid orders drives much of this sub-contracting. We asked brands about their approach to undeclared subcontracting and their purchasing practices.

Companies which	2016	2017
Have a clear strategy to address undeclared subcontracting, other than zero-tolerance	1	9
Review purchasing practices in light of the risk of undeclared subcontracting	3	9

Two brands acknowledged in both their 2016 and 2017 responses that subcontracting is an integral part of the Turkish apparel production model. Many companies still rely on the same approaches they disclosed in 2016, and reiterated their zero-tolerance policy, the capacity checks they run on their suppliers, the responsibility they devolve on them to check on their own contractors, and the consequences for failing to disclose subcontracting. More than half the brands surveyed, however, provided examples of different strategies they use to eliminate undeclared subcontracting. These approaches emphasise: openness to the possibility of sub-contracting so that suppliers can be transparent about out-sourcing needs and brands can audit new suppliers as they are recruited; collaboration between different departments of the brands and suppliers to review capacity; unannounced visits and spot checks; and interviews with workers.

Some brands stressed the importance of mutual trust with their suppliers so that the factory management can talk openly about suppliers' capacity limits and subcontracting practices. This approach focuses on open dialogue rather than treating undeclared subcontracting purely as a compliance issue. While this approach is encouraging, it would be good to find more examples of collaborative approaches between brands who have shared suppliers to bring consistency and coherence in the brands' approaches to undeclared subcontracting.

This year we asked brands how they adapt purchasing practices that reflect the capacity of their suppliers, which can help to promote decent working conditions in suppliers' factories. As we heard from business associations in our fieldwork, unpredictable orders from many different buyers, and downward pressure on prices, put significant stress on suppliers. Young buyers, who lack experience, reportedly do not understand well the structure of the Turkish industry and the commonality and risks of subcontracting. They also reportedly disregard price components of production, including labour costs, minimum wage, and health and safety, and tend to set unreasonably low prices. This frequently leads suppliers to outsource production, often to undeclared factories that provide services at a lower cost, partly through exploiting workers.

12. [Fair Wear Foundation. \(2017\). Guidance on risks related to Turkish garment factories employing Syrian refugees. p.2.](#)

Thirteen brands described their approach to evaluating the impact of their purchasing practices. Of those who responded to the question, many explained that they treat the matter as an issue of sustainability compliance. They described how their sustainability (or ethics) team and their buying or purchasing team work together to assess the production and compliance capacity of their suppliers. Through this process they seek to help suppliers review and plan for the volume and timing of orders they will receive, and therefore improve their management and human resource practices. While this addresses the capacity of suppliers, it does not yet tackle the responsibility of buyers and the due diligence of brands to evaluate and review their own purchasing practices to take into account the costs of decent labour and compliance with ethical requirements. One brand highlighted how they regularly assess local economic conditions and had increased the prices paid for goods to help their Turkish suppliers cope with an unexpected increase in the minimum wage in 2016.

We were especially encouraged to see that twelve brands surveyed are working with the Action Collaboration Transformation ([ACT](#)) Initiative globally. On joining the ACT Initiative, companies have to evaluate how their purchasing practices impact living wages and working conditions in supplier' countries. Members are exploring the expansion of the ACT Initiative to the garment and textile industry in Turkey. Seven companies in our survey specifically mentioned their participation in the initiative in their response and its potential to address the issue of living wage and decent working conditions through future industry-wide collective bargaining agreement in Turkey, as they have done in other countries where they source. We look forward to seeing and supporting this development.



### 3.3. Action taken when refugees are identified

We asked brands if they had a clear remediation plan when they identify Syrian refugees who are unregistered or who do not hold a work permit in their supply chain, including the steps they take to help the refugee become formally employed and to address any risk of discrimination against them. As noted above, there has been an evolution in brands' thinking on how to respond in the case of unregistered refugees, especially given changes in Turkish law that make it easier for refugees to work legally. Some brands also detailed their remediation plans when Syrian refugee children are detected.

Companies which	2016	2017
Have a clear remediation and protection plan in the case of undocumented Syrian refugees in their supply chain	10	20
Have a remediation plan to address discrimination against Syrian refugees	10	17
Describe a detailed plan of remediation when finding refugee children in supply chain	2	5

This year, 20 brands reported having developed a clear formal remediation plan (including guidance for their suppliers), or having an informal remedial plan, which can be deployed when Syrian refugees who do not have a work permit or not registered are found working in their supply chain. Twenty-one brands indicated that they require or encourage suppliers to keep Syrian refugees in continued employment by applying for work permits on their behalf and helping them with registration where required. These brands often have partnerships with local NGOs that can provide assistance to Syrian refugees including advice on their rights and how to legalise their employment status, and language and skills classes. Key elements of the most comprehensive approaches described by leading brands are highlighted within the inset.

The increase in the number of brands with remediation plans shows that they have slowly but constructively reacted to changes in legislation that have authorized work permits for Syrian refugees. It also demonstrates that more companies have built on the examples and experiences of brands that had already developed policies and remedial strategies in 2013 and 2014.

A third of the brands surveyed have neither formal nor informal remediation plans for their suppliers. This is a concerning finding, particularly when they justify not taking any preventive measures by explaining that they have not yet been informed of undocumented Syrian refugees in their supply chains. Such responses disregard the widespread risk of abuses as well as reporting that indicates the widespread undocumented employment of Syrian refugees, while placing their faith in audits that, as we detailed above, may not be effective in revealing the exploitation of Syrian refugees.

## The remediation plan:

- Ensures that the refugee is not adversely affected during the legalisation process (e.g. is dismissed, loses any source of income);
- States that the objective is to legalise the employment of refugee workers (where required) and ensure continued employment under equal conditions to other employees and between men and women;
- States that Syrian refugees must be working under voluntary conditions and that suppliers must not obstruct the registration and remediation process;
- Provides different remediation plans to address possible scenarios including when the refugee is registered for less than 6 months; when the refugee is registered for more than 6 months but does not yet have a permit; when the refugee is registered in another city and needs to change their registration and work permit; when it is not possible for the employer to apply for a work permit (e.g. when the factory already employs 10% refugees in their workforce); when the refugee does not want a work permit;
- Requires that the employer discloses the presence of Syrian refugees in the factory and seeks support from the brand to apply for work permits, including liaison with NGOs and financial support to cover the cost of work permits (annual fee of 558 Turkish Lira/€135 per worker);
- Recommends working with expert NGOs to set out a plan for the legalisation process and help Syrian refugees integrate in the workplace through language courses and health and safety training;
- List key information documents and websites and a list of NGOs and other organizations which can offer support and basic services (e.g. which banks can open accounts for Syrian refugees).

Five brands described their remediation plan when finding Syrian refugee children in their supply chains, even though this was not specifically required in the questionnaire. These plans all aim to ensure that the children can and will go back to, and stay in, school. To achieve this, brands and their suppliers work with NGOs for support and monitoring, and either offer the position to an adult in the family and pay a living wage (higher than legal minimum wage); or if adults are already working, provide a living wage to the family so they can keep their children in education.

When reviewing brands' action and remediation plans, one thing is glaringly missing: Brands encourage and expect their suppliers to support registration and work permit application processes so Syrian refugees can continue in formal and legal employment if they were not already. They offer training for capacity building and help suppliers liaise with NGOs to assist in the process. Yet they do not appear to be ready to support the financial and human resource costs of these processes for their suppliers.

### 3.4. Capacity building & cascading standards through suppliers

We asked brands about the capacity building that they had undertaken with their tier 1 suppliers to support employment and protection of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, given the widespread practice of undeclared subcontracting in Turkey (and in the industry generally), we also asked them how they were seeking to ensure standards were cascaded beyond tier 1 suppliers.

Companies which	2016	2017
Support suppliers to employ Syrian refugees (including through training and guidance)	13	22
Have clear process to ensure policies /approach are communicated beyond tier 1	6	15

As noted by the business associations we interviewed, a lack of financial support and problematic purchasing practices are the two factors suppliers identify as barriers to delivering on ethical compliance issues and taking responsibility for the ethical practices of their sub-contractors.

This year, 22 brands were able to point to additional activities they are undertaking to cascade standards through their subcontractors, beyond communicating their policies to all suppliers. This support usually takes the form of guidance on employing Syrian refugees and directing suppliers to NGOs with which they have developed partnerships to assist with obtaining registration and work permits for refugees and to provide training on rights, language and skills.

A number of brands also ran special trainings and conferences with the support of partners such as UNHCR, ETI, FTA and/or Turkish business associations on the situation of Syrian refugees for all their suppliers. Several such events to inform and decide on recommendations and actions have taken place in Turkey and in Europe.

It is disappointing that only one brand suggests that they would provide financial support to their suppliers to meet the cost of work permits for Syrian refugees. For instance, Fair Wear Foundation advises its brand members sourcing from Turkey to support factories with some costs such as the annual registration fee.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, in response to our question on cascading standards, most brands outline how they delegate the responsibility of communicating standards and monitoring them to their tier 1 suppliers. Brands then check compliance during audits. As we observed last year, while these are good principles, brands should be wary of a simple reliance on contractual terms or a commitment from suppliers. This alone is not sufficient to ensure proper cascading of standards.

13. See [Fair Wear Foundation, \(2017\). Guidance on risks related to Turkish garment factories employing Syrian refugees.](#)

We received some encouraging examples of initiatives to cascade and monitor compliance, including brands which have mapped their supply chains, expanded their Turkey-based team, conduct more regular unannounced audits in risk areas and provide trainings and conferences to all suppliers. One brand also emphasised the importance of collective approach to address human rights risks in supply chains and how they are working in partnership with Fair Labour Association to engage suppliers in the cotton sector in Turkey. This approach acknowledges the depth of supply chains beyond the production of clothes and how exploitation occurs in related sectors on which brands can have influence to improve practices.

These are good developments since last year's reported practices. We encourage more pre-competitive collective action and cooperation between brands and other stakeholders to help identify risks, share ethical audit data, and share remediation and oversight on all levels of supply and production chains.



### 3.5. Stakeholder engagement

We asked brands if they are working with local NGOs or trade unions, for example to carry out risk assessments and provide remedy for Syrian refugees when they are found in factories. We also asked them whether they are working with international partners or involved in action to engage with the Turkish Government.

Companies which	2016	2017
Work with <b>local CSOs</b> on Syrian refugees mapping/training, H&S and/or education issues	8	11
Work with <b>local TUs</b> on Syrian refugees mapping/training, H&S and/or education issues	2	2
Work with international partners ETI, FTA/ BSCI, FLA and IndustriALL and local NGOs on Syrian refugees risks mapping/ training, Health & Safety and/or education issues	11	25
Have joined collective action to engage the Turkish Govt on legal change or other	13	20

This year, 25 brands pointed to some form of collaborative and collective action they have taken as part of their initiatives to support and protect Syrian refugees in their supply chains in Turkey. It should be noted that not all brands pointed to specific actions or examples and many were vague about their role in these collective initiatives. MSIs are particularly popular, as brands work with and through various partners such as Fair Labour Association, Fair Wear Foundation, IndustriALL, ETI, FTA and BSCI to develop guidance, organise trainings and conferences for suppliers, link with NGOs that can support Syrian refugees and suppliers in a variety of ways, etc. MSIs are well placed to act as a bridge between different stakeholders including brands, NGOs, trade unions, business associations and international organizations. They provide the space to build trust between parties and work cooperatively to share relevant information, identify risks, and lobby government for legislative changes on behalf of their members.

Twenty brands report having worked through MSIs to continue engaging the Turkish Government to improve access to work for Syrian refugees. After lobbying the Government to introduce work permits in 2015, 11 of the brands we surveyed reported co-signing a [letter](#) to the Turkish Government in April 2017 calling for greater access to work for Syrian refugees. The letter outlined six areas 'where actions by the Turkish Government could help Syrians secure legal work with the same protections as local workers'.

Four brands supported ETI and FLA to contribute to the publication and distribution of a booklet on the rights and responsibilities of Syrian refugees that was created by the Turkish Ministry of Labour and is available in Turkish and Arabic.

## Recommendations of FLA and FTA led letter co-signed by 21 brands and other institutions:

- Make work permits valid beyond the city of initial registration;
- Facilitate access to public and private banks to prevent off-the-books transactions;
- Ensure access to vocational and career development courses offered by the government;
- Waive the fee imposed on employers applying to legally employ refugees;
- Provide a vocational qualification evaluation for Syrian asylum seekers; and
- Exempt Syrian employees from fines imposed for being employed without a work permit.

Some brands emphasised how these collective and collaborative approaches reinforce their action, especially when they have small supply chains in the country. Two brands - one which only recently started to source from Turkey and another one which has a few suppliers in the country - explained that they had joined MSIs to learn from others and reinforce these cooperative actions. We encourage such action-focused initiatives and the development of common work streams and coordination between them to align standards of best practice. The handful of brands that stated that they only have a small part of their production in Turkey and therefore are not taking preventive action or doing any advocacy could do well to join and learn from existing initiatives.

Only three more brands (11 in total) reported working with local NGOs as part of MSIs or through formal partnerships to provide necessary support to Syrian refugees found working illegally in factories. One brand did stress the importance of working with local NGOs, which have a deep understanding of issues confronting Syrian refugees and have built the experience to provide solutions to individual situations. This highlights the need for brands and manufacturers to build closer relations with Turkish civil society, which often knows far more about the daily struggles of their refugee workers and remedies to their most pressing needs. Brands, however, should not use partnerships with local NGOs to outsource their due diligence, or to tick a compliance box, but to improve the rights of Syrian refugees. They should also be ready to support NGOs they work with in a context where civic freedoms are being undermined and some NGOs working with brands and Syrian refugees have been closed.

Brands do not appear to engage directly with local garment trade unions on the issues confronting Syrian refugees, including remediation, risk mapping or training. Rather, this dialogue usually takes place through the IndustriALL Global Union, to which Turkish garment trade unions are affiliated. As noted at the outset of the report, local trade unions cannot organise Syrian refugees because most refugees work in the informal sector or are working illegally. As a result, they cannot join unions because of structural barriers prohibiting union membership to unregistered workers. Furthermore, local trade unions do not have the capacity to organise members that cannot pay fees legally.

Companies serious about improving the rights of Syrian refugees as well as other unregistered workers in Turkey should look at ways to support the legalization of employment and work with trade unions to enable and encourage representation and collective bargaining to improve working conditions. These actions are co-dependent. As noted by Fair Wear Foundation in their recent briefing, “bringing workers into the formal economy can significantly reduce the risks of a wide range of discriminatory and abusive work situations.” This includes the possibility for Syrian refugee workers to organise through trade unions and benefit from representation in the workplace. In turn, by directly engaging with local partners, brands would be closer to their workers and to the Syrian refugees they want to help.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Almost two years on, our survey has found that many more brands have developed preventive policies and strategies to facilitate the formal employment of Syrian refugees and tackle risks of exploitation in their supply chains in Turkey. Following the change in the law enabling Syrian refugees to secure a work permit, more brands and their suppliers are ready to engage with the issue, though the pace of expanding access to work permits is glacial. Given the reported persistent discrimination and abuse of Syrian refugees in supply chains, these enhanced policies and practices now need to be systematically embedded in order to transform the brands' human rights performance. A small number of brands appear to be substantially further along this path than the majority.

We found and highlighted good examples of human rights due diligence, risk assessment and clear communication on continued equal employment of Syrian refugees once suppliers have applied for work permits on their behalf. More brands have joined multi-stakeholder initiatives to collaboratively tackle the issue with their other brands, international organizations, trade unions, local NGOs, and business associations.

Leading brands have expanded their Turkey-based teams and mapped their supply chains to better locate their suppliers and to comply with the Transparency in Supply Chains Clause of the UK Modern Slavery Act. More brands have also moved to regular unannounced audits in tier 1 and beyond, which have enabled them to find refugees without permits whom they have helped to get legal employment. According to some brands, their suppliers also appear more open to reporting the presence of Syrian refugees to their buyers and have sought guidance and support to apply for work permits and get assistance from NGOs where needed.

Yet, surprisingly few Syrian refugees are being identified. Also, even though individual work permits seem to be processed relatively quickly, the total number is expanding extremely slowly in contrast to the numbers of refugees estimated to be working informally in the garment sector. As we have heard from brands and business associations, suppliers might be reluctant to hire Syrian refugees with work permits, or make applications, partly because of the demand for cheap and rapidly-completed orders from brands.

There clearly is a need from the Turkish Government to improve access to work permits for refugees through changes in the law. But brands also need to consider what incentives and support they can give their suppliers to formally employ Syrian refugees and submit applications for their work permits. Therefore, enhanced policies and practices to tackle access to decent work and discrimination against Syrian refugees now need to be systematically embedded in the purchasing practices and communications of the brands. Only in this way will these welcomed advances transform the brands' human rights performance in Turkey and enhance the conditions of the majority of refugee workers who do not possess work permits.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Enhance the identification and assessment of abuse of workers:**

Brands should work individually and collectively to identify key human rights risks for Syrian refugees by conducting deep-dive risk assessment throughout their shared supply chains.

### **Develop and implement a refugee protection strategy:**

Learning from the best practice of leading brands, and working in collaboration with other key stakeholders, brands should develop and implement a clear policy and strategy to ensure workers are protected from exploitation and can access work under equal conditions at their suppliers' facilities. Particular attention should be paid to the unique risks faced by women refugees. Policy and strategy should be robustly communicated to all suppliers and suppliers' sub-contractors in Turkey.

- Zero tolerance of discrimination against Syrian refugees, between men and women refugee workers, in wages and equity in broader terms and conditions;
- Steps to address the challenges facing workers before they can secure a work permit, including payment of at least the Gross Minimum Wage, recognising these workers do not receive social security benefits; and
- A plan that places clear expectations on suppliers to support refugees to secure a work permit and to continue in equal employment and protect children found to be working in factories (including supporting them to re-enter education and compensating for income loss).

### **Support Turkish suppliers to encourage formal employment of Syrian refugees:**

Brands' expectations and requirements should be based on deeper collaboration between brands and their suppliers. Brands should provide adequate support to suppliers, including: training for awareness-raising and capacity-building; liaising with workers' organizations and NGOs to help refugees with work permits applications, and provide language and skills classes; and financial support to cover the cost of work permits and the cost of leave Syrian refugees need to obtain these and/or register in their new city.

### **Change purchasing policy:**

Brands need to change their purchasing practices to avoid encouraging an environment of abuse. Brands know that too often their own buyers' demands for urgent delivery and low price drives much of their order from their declared supplier to lower tiers of the supply chain where abuse of workers' rights, especially refugee-workers, is prevalent. Brands should set up pre-competitive collaboration, to ensure their collective buying practices support the rights, including minimum wage, of all workers in their supply chains. The ACT model from Cambodia could help transform the brands' collective approach, and bring benefits to all stakeholders. They should also ensure coherence between their ethical and purchasing departments, and establish an open dialogue with suppliers regarding reasonable purchasing practice.

### **Support civil society, work with trade unions and workers:**

Brands should expand efforts to individually and collectively support the work of local NGOs, trade unions and refugee support groups, recognising that they understand the abuse and problems that refugees face in making clothes and footwear for brands, and are key in designing effective solutions.



Brands should also explore ways to ensure meaningful worker participation and be open to entering into legally-binding agreements with groups representing workers, in line with international labour standards and a worker-driven social responsibility model.

**Collaborative action to strengthen industry-level approach to tackle broader issues:**

Collective and pre-competitive initiatives would strengthen the industry-level approach to fight against informal labour and child labour and improve decent working conditions for all workers including refugees and immigrants. Many brands have joined multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) as a vehicle to facilitate this type of collaboration and expand it to include other stakeholders. MSIs could also be used to develop shared learning forums for other brands to learn from best practice.

**Joint action to enhance government regulation and implementation, and insist on European support for refugees:**

The Turkish people and government have shown extraordinary generosity in welcoming over three million refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria. The conditions for all workers could be enhanced by more alignment and consistency between ministries policy and practice. Industry stakeholders should collaborate in joint projects and activities that enable constructive dialogue between them and the Turkish Government. Such collaborative action could facilitate stakeholders to:

- Pursue collective advocacy actions towards the Turkish Government to further review the law on work permits, and its speed of implementation;
- Encourage strengthening the capacity of the Turkish Labour Agency (İŞKUR) to implement the law and monitor progress, and build cross-ministerial coherence to facilitate registration of refugees and access to work permits.

**Commit publicly to long term sourcing from Turkey:**

This will provide the economic security and enable the systemic changes necessary in the industry to benefit Syrian refugees and Turkish workers alike.

## **About Business & Human Rights Resource Centre**

Business and Human Rights Resource Centre is an international NGO that tracks the human rights impacts (positive & negative) of over 7000 companies in over 180 countries making information available on its eight language website. We seek responses from companies when concerns are raised by civil society. The response rate is over 75% globally.

### **Report authors:**

Dr Samentha Goethals  
Senior Researcher in Labour Rights, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre

Dr Emre Korkmaz  
Newton International Fellow & St Edmund Hall  
Junior Research Fellow - International  
Migration Institute, Department of International  
Development, University of Oxford



**Business & Human Rights  
Resource Centre**