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Informal Employment and the Syrian Refugees in Supply Chains: The Case of Textile and Garment Sector in Turkey

As reported by the UNHCR, the world faces the greatest movement of millions of hopeless people since World War II in which Turkey has become the major refugee-hosting country due to unpredicted influx of Syrian refugees who were forced to flee from the civil war in Syria (UNHCR 2014). Although Syrian refugees are still being seen as "guest" (a word chosen over "refugees") in Turkey, it has already been proved that their displacement situation will not be resolved in near future and will unfortunately continue to be defined as "protracted" and unresolved. According to the UNHCR data from January 2016, 4,603,363 registered refugees have forced to leave Syria to escape from brutal war conditions and oppression and 2,503,549 refugees have been settled in Turkey (UNHCR 2016).

In order to respond to the crisis and to meet the emergency protection needs arising in a situation of mass Syrian refugee influx, the Government of Turkey adopted the Temporary Protection Regulation on October 2014. The regulation defines temporary protection for Syrians, providing unconditional acceptance into national territories with an open border policy, application of the principle of non-refoulement without exception, meeting the basic needs of incoming individuals. On the other hand, in order to facilitate Syrians' access to labour market and decent work opportunities, the secondary regulation on work permits has very recently been adopted by the Government. As is known, Syrian refugees are already in the labour market by mainly working in the informal sector where core labour and social rights are not respected and in seasonal agricultural work, manufacturing, textile, garment and construction sectors. Since Syrians are very vulnerable to abuse and violation, there are many reports from textile factories of child labour, sexual abuse of women workers, very low wages and unfavourable working conditions (Huffington Post 2016).

In this regard, this study aims to ascertain informal labour of Syrian refugees in the supply chains of textile and garment sector in Turkey by examining the current situation on working conditions, violations of core labour rights and the response of global textile brands and companies on these violations. The textile and garment sector is one of the most important and successful industries of the Turkish economy both in terms of job creation and economic growth. Turkey continues to be an important centre in the supply chains of multinational textile companies including Inditex, Nike, H&M, M&S, Nike, Adidas etc. However, the sector is also one of the least organized sectors where trade union membership rate is less 3% and the power of unions is rather weak.

Against this background, this study will discuss the impacts of work permits on textile and garment sector and explore in which steps of textile supply chains Syrian refugees are mostly working by using secondary resources and reviewing the literature. On the other hand, in-depth interviews with the representatives of global textile brands, international NGOs, trade unions and associations of textile and apparel exporters will be conducted to reinforce the study.

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