



NOW IS THE TIME FOR A STRATEGY TO EMPLOY SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

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Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) is an international multi-stakeholder non-profit organisation that works with clothing companies—and their supply chains—to improve working conditions in the garment industry. By becoming a member of FWF, a company commits to implementing the FWF Code of Labour Practices throughout its supply chain. Currently more than 130 brands have joined FWF.

Fair Wear Foundation strives to increase awareness about working conditions and workers' rights in textile factories. For more information, please visit www.fairwear.org.

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As we are in year seven of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, it is high time to focus on specific, strategic policies for the employment of Syrian refugees in supply chains. A tailor-made strategy, comprised of a localised, workplace-oriented plan, includes tangible targets and achievements.

Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, this strategy takes into account the uniqueness of each supplier based on certain principles such as the locality, size of workforces, volume of production and FWF member companies' share of this volume.

This strategy requires the following two components:

1. A close collaboration with each supplier (which includes understanding their needs and long-term plans).
2. An analysis of the local economies and politics (which directly affects refugees based on location, i.e. the cities of Izmir, Istanbul, Konya, Gaziantep and Urfa each have a different approach).

In Gaziantep, for instance, as a consequence of the long-term partnership between the metropolitan municipality, local councils, business and industry associations, central authorities and Syrian business associations/NGOs, Syrian refugees could fill the labour shortages and boost the local economy. However, the situation in Izmir is entirely different, making the situation not mutually beneficial to both areas.

A HETEROGENEOUS SOCIETY

Today Turkey has welcomed approximately four million refugees (the world's largest refugee population), 3.5 million of whom are Syrian. Included in this number are 462,000 asylum seekers, predominately from Iraq and Afghanistan.

There are millions of Syrians who have now been living in Turkey for a number of years, and who are building their lives and futures in Turkey. In year seven, we are now talking about a heterogeneous society. Syrian refugees may fit the following descriptions:

1. They have been granted Turkish citizenship (38,000 including family members).
2. They are legally employed with work permits (21,000).
3. They are entrepreneurs/business people.
4. They are students. In Turkey, there are around 1.1 million school-aged Syrian children, and approximately 400,000 of these children are not enrolled in school. Although the challenging task of registering 612,000 refugee children with the national education system can already be considered a success, it is still necessary to focus on the future of the remaining 400,000 refugee children. There are also 20,000 undergraduate students in 140 universities.
5. They are returning migrants who left Germany or other European countries to return Turkey as a result of difficulties in the job market and delays in family unification.

REASONS FOR A TAILOR-MADE APPROACH

There are four main reasons for a tailor-made approach that targets specific and concrete achievements:

1. Firstly, many national and international meetings, workshops and projects have been formed to deal with the employment of Syrians. All these meetings and projects, run by various multi-stakeholder initiatives, (I)NGOs, UN agencies and central and local authorities, have raised awareness on this issue. At this moment, there is no need to lose more time in repeating similar discourses.
2. The second reason is the current political tension. Turkey is under a state of emergency rule; Turkey just passed through a presidential and parliamentary elections in June 2018 and there will be local elections in 2019, and the Syrian refugee question has been highly politicised as opposition candidates repeatedly promise to send refugees back to their homes. Bringing peace to Syria is stated as a pre-condition; however, such discourse feeds the discontent against refugees within the society and create a hostile environment for them. Such political risks deter authorities from promoting migrant/refugee rights.
3. Another reason is an imminent economic crisis. The Turkish economy signals a crisis, with currency fluctuations bringing severe problems to the industry. Financial figures such as unemployment and inflation rates are expected to be higher than in previous years. This would decrease the probability of refugees and immigrants finding decent, legal jobs.
4. Finally, Turkey is not only a transit country or a country of immigration, but is also a country of destination for migration movements. Therefore, the Syrian refugee crisis is not an isolated or unique problem. There are other refugees and immigrants coming to Turkey from Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Balkans, Caucasasia, Russia and Africa. The textile/garment industry acts as one of the primary manufacturing industries that provides employment opportunities for all the people on the move, necessitating a long-term strategy for multi-stakeholder initiatives to deal with migrant and refugee labour.

OBSTACLES

There are two main obstacles hindering the progress of supporting refugee employment:

1. Firstly, the business model and purchasing practices of brands and corporations limits the flexibility of suppliers in hiring new workers. As the Turkish textile-garment industry relies on a multi-tier supply chain, the pressure to both lower costs and maintain short delivery periods in addition to the lack of a long-term business projection, deters suppliers from investing in social rights and hiring new workers, instead they prefer to work with sub-suppliers.
2. The second are the short-term and isolated practices of social actors in supporting the employment of refugees. The main reason for this is the lack of coordination and collaboration that is needed to see the situation improve.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are three main opportunities that would promote progress on the efforts to legally employ refugees:

1. Because of various projects and events exposing the issue, many social actors are more willing to contribute to this process. Many local and national business/employer associations, global brands/corporations sourcing from Turkey, various (I)NGOs/MSIs and UN agencies and local authorities are formulating projects based on previous experiences to address the expectations of all stakeholders.
2. As a result of the aforementioned efforts, there are more opportunities to match a job-seeking refugee with an employer. Together with local authorities working within UN agencies, specialised NGOs bring refugees together and provide skills training and language courses, with the intent to provide refugees with jobs.
3. Meanwhile, more Syrians are deciding to remain in Turkey, and current efforts to train and hire refugees are receiving a positive response from Syrian refugees themselves. Despite the many projects being funded, most of these are local and isolated from one another. Syrians attend these events and follow the aims and instructions of these projects.

RISKS IN TURKEY

Turkey is a major host of refugees, and it is necessary to acknowledge that central and local authorities, together with local communities, have been working hard to provide services for refugees. Although many refugees face daily problems in the areas of education, labour market integration and health services, there are observable improvements within these services. Authorities have begun to place more importance on long-term development policies, aside from humanitarian assistance. However, there are political, economic and other risks that should be considered. Identifying these risks are critical, because even though industry-level coordination and cooperation paves the way for the legal and decent employment of refugees, national or global risks may hinder the process.

The state of emergency following the failed coup attempt in June 2016 is one of the main political risks. The state of emergency and government decrees experience a frequent shift in the bureaucratic structure, as a high turnover of bureaucrats creates periodic delays in the existing agenda, including the departments and directorates dealing with refugees. Additionally, the state has closed many NGOs, including some dealing with refugees. For instance, Mercy Corps and IMPR were among these NGOs that UNHCR and many corporations had been cooperating with, but it was suddenly shuttered by a government decree.

Another political risk is the politicisation of the refugee question following the presidential referendum in April 2017. Although there have been many elections since 2011, the refugee question has not been at the top of any of the political parties' agendas. However, many opposition figures began to use the refugee question to increase their support in the 2016 referendum and the recent presidential elections. Under the new regime, the president needs 51% of total votes, and within the narrow margin between political components, the refugee issue may become more central in the agendas of political parties. For instance, On 8 April 2018,

the leader of the main opposition party, **K. Kılıçdaroğlu** claimed that Syrians are treated as first-class citizens and the Turks as second-class citizens or **Sinan Ogan**, a former member of parliament of MHP claimed that while Turkish soldiers die in Syria fighting against ISIS, thousands of young Syrians in Turkey are partying on beaches.

Apart from domestic politics, Turkey's policies towards refugees might also be affected by current Turkey-EU relations. For instance, **President Erdoğan** stated on 25 November 2016 that they might open the borders for refugees who would like to go to Europe. This was a direct response to the European Parliament's decision to freeze Turkey's EU membership process. Government spokesperson **Numan Kurtulmuş** argued on 13 March 2017 that the Turkey-EU refugee deal should be cancelled when public meetings of Turkish ministers for the referendum campaign were not permitted in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands.

Apart from the political risks, it is worth mentioning economic risks. High unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, currency fluctuations and possible economic problems in the future may affect the livelihoods of refugees from both the job creation and employment side and in terms of their relationship with local communities.

Finally, security risks (such as war in Syria and terror attacks) may also change public perceptions of refugees.

Although the projects and programmes geared toward 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 the future.

MAIN CHALLENGES

There are three main challenges for the labour market integration of refugees:

1. The first and most essential challenge for refugees is being trapped in the informal labour economy. Although Turkey has a considerable percentage of the informal economy (around 35 per cent), it is easier for Turkish citizens to gain legal employment when available. However, work permit restrictions make it much more difficult for refugees to find legal jobs. Therefore, the challenge in Turkey is to open legal channels of employment and provide a smooth transition from the informal to formal economy for both refugee workers and self-employed refugees.
2. Child labour is still a significant challenge. Because approximately 400,000 Syrian children are not enrolled in school, they may face difficult conditions that force them to work. It is not difficult to find ten-year-old children making shoes at workplaces in Izmir or Gaziantep with their family members, working 13 hours per day and earning 100 TL (25 Euro) per week.
3. The labour market integration of Syrian refugees needs an urgent long-term official strategy and collaboration among social actors, not only for the ones currently in the labour market but also for the hundreds of thousands of students who will join the job market in the near future. The 600,000 students currently in primary education and 20,000 undergraduates will begin looking for jobs in the coming years, and will be in a more advantageous position as they will know the Turkish language and have more skills. The ones

who have been granted citizenship will have better opportunities in the market and will face similar conditions as their local peers; however, the ones who do not have citizenship will face the current problem of obtaining work permits. In both scenarios, it is clear that it will be easier for Turkish employers willing to employ refugees to find skilled workers within the refugee community.

DRAWING A STRATEGY MAP

The first step is to separate large factories from small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). In Turkey, the majority of workplaces are SMEs, and many one-size-fits-all approaches on social dialogue and industrial relations take large factories as a base. However, these formulations do not fit the concrete conditions of small enterprises.

Next, the focus should shift to the city-level situation to understand the unique features of the targeted city, such as Izmir or Gaziantep. This will include the analysis of the local economy, local politics including perceptions towards refugees, and number of refugees living and working in that city.

The next scale will be the town-level or industrial-zone level situation. For instance, while there are skills-training projects for refugees in some industrial zones in Antep, this might not be the case for Izmir.

Lastly, there must be a focus on the conditions and expectations of each supplier. National and local-level analyses will help offer specific requests that will be elaborated upon with the local management. The first condition needed to employ a refugee worker is to open a job position; then it can be possible to convince and support that employer to hire a refugee. This depends on the mid- and long-term business plans of the supplier.

Such dialogue should be complemented by sharing opinions on purchasing practices and social dialogue. The issue of employing refugees could also pave the way for other social investments.

Local and central authorities are eager to collaborate with local business partners. Therefore, it might be a better choice for suppliers and local business associations to act in coordination with FWF. FWF's training tools for the management and local/refugee workers and workshops/events will help suppliers to have a deeper understanding of the situation. FWF also assists suppliers to legalize the informal refugee workers and help refugee children to be enrolled in national education.

GOOD PRACTICES

Many projects have the potential for a positive outcome. This paper focuses on the following five examples:

UNDP-Koton joint project in the border towns: As a result of the inclusive business model promoted by the UNDP, the agency is collaborating with one of the largest Turkish garment brand-retailers, Koton, in the South-eastern Anatolia region to support the employment of women, including refugee women. This project is formulated based on the previous experience of the brand Argende, which was produced by the local woman of the region and sold at Mudo stores.

Koton's project began as a pilot project in 2016 when local women gathered at Multi-Purpose Community Centres (ÇATOM) of the South-eastern Anatolia Project (GAP). Koton gave an order for 13,000 units of product; self-employed women gathered within these community centres fulfilled the order, and all products were sold very quickly at Koton stores. Another pilot project was designed for the 2016/17 Christmas/New Year collection, and this was a success as well. Lastly, Koton gave an order of 130,000 units of production for the 2017 summer collection, and these were all produced in one-month's time. Women are currently producing for the 2018 summer collection. The project aims to increase the production to work year-round, covering all seasonal collections.

The project began with 800 women employees, and now over 2,500 women are in production, including 800 Syrian refugees. These women work at 18 community centres and two refugee camps, with no intermediary. The cost of a production unit exceeds the costs of the region, but is still below prices in Istanbul, and payment is made directly to the women in the production process. The total revenue in 2017 was over 1.5 million TL (more than €300,000).

The success of the project attracted the attention of the Ministry of Development and additional brands, resulting in the likelihood that this project will expand to include more women.

United Work: The United Work Reintegration and Placement Service is an NGO that runs a social responsibility project funded by the Dutch government with the goal of supporting Syrian refugees employed in Turkey. The NGO has been active since February 2017 and collaborates with various corporations, including many ETI members. All services are free of charge.

United Work collects positions from companies and résumés from job-seeking refugees and places candidates in suitable jobs. The NGO provides job-coaching and training (a five-day training module) for refugees before they are placed in Turkish business life and industrial relations. United Work also has a textile specific programme, with a trajectory that additionally provides health and safety training.

From February 2017 to March 2018, United Work provided work permits to more than 900 refugees, 46 per cent of them within the textile-garment industry. The NGO trained more than 800 refugees during this term and has received more than 1,500 vacancies from 200 companies. United Work paid the work permit fee for 250 refugees with ILO funds.

ETI's Turkey programme: The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has conducted its Turkey programme since 2016 by forming a local platform on business and human rights. This programme has paved the way for deeper dialogue and a better coordination of corporations, suppliers, business and labour associations and NGOs. ETI's Turkey programme also includes various sub-groups, such as social dialogue, purchasing practices, and employment of Syrian refugees.

It is quite clear that all debates on the employment of refugees and social dialogue are connected to the purchasing practices of global brands. The local business associations' critique of the purchasing practices of global brands-corporations has received a positive response from the member companies. To improve purchasing practices, ETI published a guideline for responsible buying, and many member companies have also initiated their own efforts to strengthen their relationships with suppliers and reform their own purchasing practices.

These efforts focus on rewarding suppliers that both employ refugees and invest in social rights. Better cooperation with their brands allows supplier companies to make long-term plans and opens new positions to employ refugees.

Lobbying activities of FLA: The Fair Labor Association (FLA) prioritises lobbying activities to support employment of refugees. By earning support of its members and other associations, FLA expressed demands of the industry towards the authorities. This includes both efforts to convince the government to formulate the work permit regulation and requests to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security to ease the work permit process (e.g. decreasing the cost of the work permit fee and simplifying the process of a refugee opening a bank account).

Campaign against child labour: In coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, **The Prime Ministry** declared 2018 as the year to combat child labour with the implementation of the National Programme to Fight against Child Labour (2018-2023). This is an official policy to raise awareness of and eliminate child labour.

The campaign is a consequence of the international attention on Turkey's child labour issue, which includes hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugee children. Many local authorities (governors and mayors), predominately in the border region, initiated local projects and signed collaboration agreements with NGOs. This is a step toward further cooperation.

FAIR WEAR FOUNDATION'S EXPERIENCES

Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) has been working to support the decent and legal working conditions for Syrian refugees in Turkey. Allied with many industry stakeholders (including other multi-stakeholder initiatives), local business associations, trade unions and NGOs, FWF is working to raise awareness and to lobby on this issue. FWF has conducted projects with a focus on informing suppliers and supporting Syrian refugees found at local suppliers. The organisation's goal is to work together with suppliers in applying for work permits and supporting refugee children by enrolling them in formal education.

In 2014 for instance, FWF auditors found five Syrian children working at a Tier 2 supplier (supplier of a Tier 1 supplier of FWF members). These children were enrolled in schools, and brands have agreed to financially support them until they turn 15. Three of these children have gone abroad, and FWF has been regularly visiting the remaining two children and continuing its support. The main challenge was to find a proper, high-quality education for these children at a time where only privately-owned temporary education centres were serving Syrian children. This is easier in today's conditions as the Ministry of Education enrolls students in formal education.

Another case was involved in supporting a local supplier that was applying for work permits for a group of Syrian refugees. FWF, the member brand and the local supplier agreed to provide work permits for refugees. However, during this process, all refugees left the job, some of them moving to another country and the others rejecting work permits in order to keep government aid. This once again reveals the complexity of remediation and the importance of a tailor-made approach.

FWF has a call centre-helpline for Syrian refugees, which is operated by Arabic-speaking staff. The helpline is advertised via posters in workplaces; however, since most refugees are employed in lower tiers of the supply chain, it is more difficult to reach out to Syrian workers to inform them of this service.

In another initiative, FWF convened a supplier seminar in February 2017 and provided online training (a webinar) for suppliers and brands, during which the legal and technical framework of employing refugees was explained in detail. These events were very productive as suppliers demonstrated their interest in the issue by asking specific questions.

FWF also added a new targeted module to its Workplace Education Programme. This training programme is in English, Turkish and Arabic, with management, foremen and Syrian refugees being trained on different matters. A joint training module addressing both Syrian and Turkish workers was developed as well.

Finally, FWF prepared a guideline for suppliers to legally employ refugees and also elaborated on both its experiences in the field and approach in the FWF country-study reports.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

The following are four useful observations from the field that can be used in launching new projects supporting the employment of refugees:

1. First, the overwhelming majority of Syrian refugees work under an informal economy without work permits, and the majority of them receive wages below the minimum wage. However in year seven, research shows that there has been a gradual increase in their salaries. Recent research conducted in Istanbul, Antep and Izmir revealed that many skilled refugees are able to earn more than minimum wage, thus the wages of refugees and locals in south-eastern Turkey began to become balanced. In Istanbul, the average wage of a female refugee is still around half of the minimum wage, but male refugees might receive closer to minimum wage.

Refugees are able to find jobs by accepting low wages, and in many industrial zones in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, acceptance of these wages has forced locals out of jobs, with refugees taking over most work. Refugees have an intense inner solidarity and networks; being informally employed does not force refugees to commit to their employers, and they change jobs easily when offered slightly higher wages from a workplace next door. Additionally, social networks allow them to get to know workplaces that provide better conditions, the main factor that enables refugees to increase their wages. Of course, the wages are still very low, but it is important to understand the dynamics and trends.

2. The second observation is on the state's approach towards (I)NGOs. When an INGO receives funds from a donor, that INGO generally outsources this project to a local NGO, resulting in less money going toward refugees. The authorities would like to have more input on the use of these funds, claiming that NGOs' uncoordinated efforts do not allow them to make long-term plans.

Thus, the government is preparing to regulate and limit the activities of humanitarian NGOs in the near future. The main argument is that in year seven of the crisis, there should be a shift from a humanitarian approach to a long-term/integration and development-oriented approach. NGOs will not be excluded, but their activities will be limited. Some fundamental funders and donors aiming to reduce NGO project funding also share this approach.

3. Third, it is almost impossible for Syrian refugees to transfer their city of registration to Istanbul because authorities are attempting to control the population of Syrians in Istanbul (which is officially 557,000). Therefore nearly all applications of refugees seeking re-registration in Istanbul are rejected. This is significant for work permits because in order to have a work permit, refugees must work in the city of registration. When a refugee finds a job in a different city, the first condition is to re-register in that city. The main motivation behind this approach is an attempt to prevent negative reactions from locals for the upcoming local elections.
4. The last observation is about the joint strike that occurred in September 2017 among informal Syrian, Turkish and Kurdish shoe workers in Izmir. Similar strikes took place in some other cities including Istanbul and Konya. Workers were on strike for nearly one week, and succeeded in increasing their wages. These strikes are significant because they demonstrate one of the first instances of the joint labour struggle of Syrians and Turkish citizens.

IN CONCLUSION

In year seven of the Syrian refugee question, many opportunities and challenges are still before us. Based on the experiences of the industry stakeholders, a proactive and tailor-made approach is necessary to take further steps.

Support should continue for refugees who are working informally in the supply chain. Support should also be given to Syrian children who are forced to work instead of going to school. However, we should not limit ourselves to one particular approach. Many refugees are willing to work legally with work permits, sharing their CVs with certain NGOs and joining training activities for various projects. It is therefore necessary to ally with both these NGOs and projects in order to reach out to refugees who are willing to work legally.

This necessitates collaboration with suppliers, since the first condition in employing refugees is to open a position. Therefore suppliers planning to hire new workers should consider refugee workers. With the support of FWF and allied NGOs that take care of all legal procedures and provide short-term training, refugee workers should be able to apply for these positions alongside local workers. United Work is focused on this issue.

To support refugees, the constant dialogue between brands and suppliers to improve the purchasing practices is essential to support suppliers investing in social practices. Brands should critically examine their role in perpetuating problems in the industry.

Fair Wear Foundation should continue its collaboration with other MSIs, such as ETI and FLA, as well as local industry stakeholders, including business associations and trade unions, in order to raise awareness and lobby for better integration of refugees into the labour market.

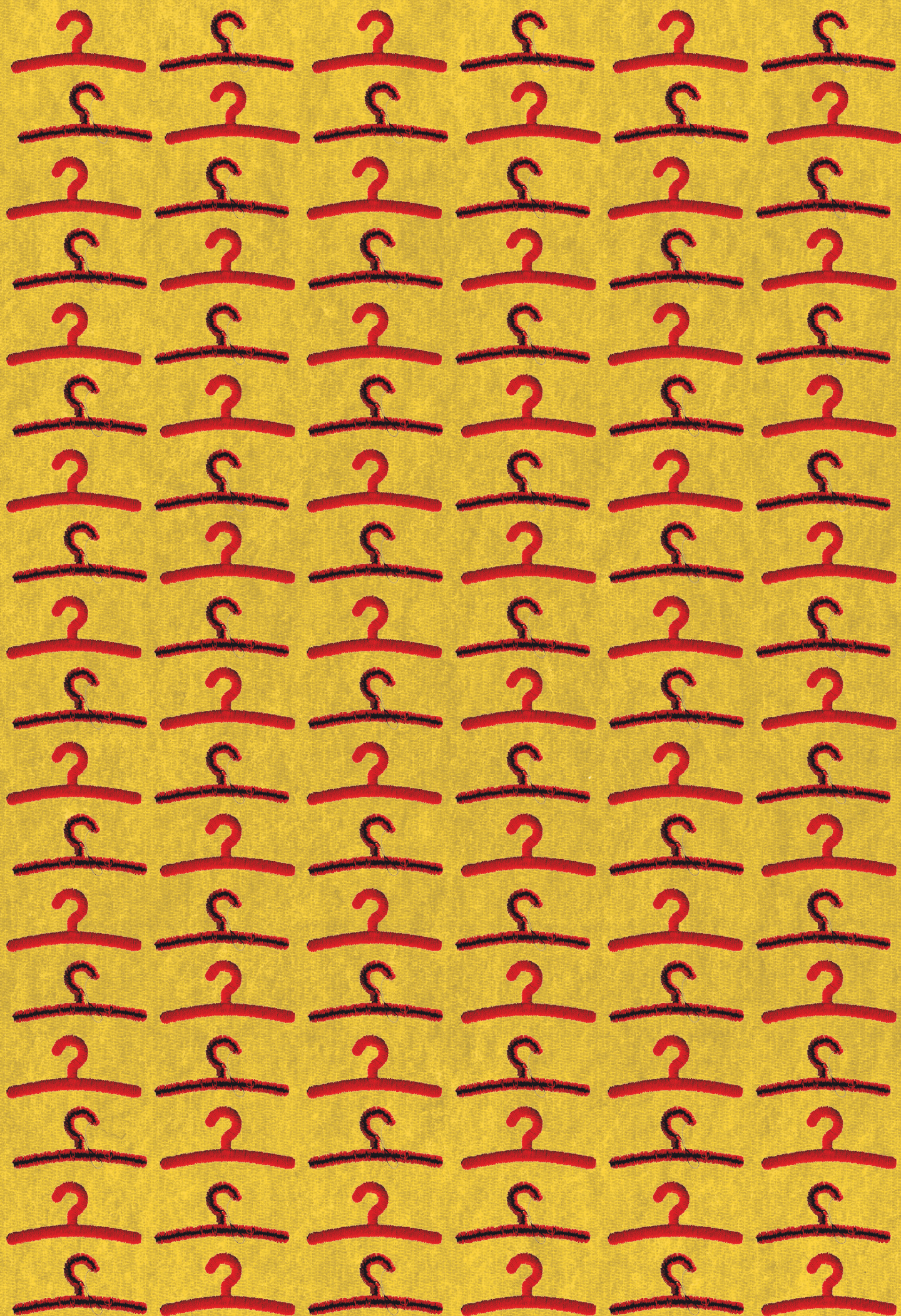
APPENDIX

THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR REFUGEES

- The **official number** of registered Syrians in Turkey is 3,562,1523.
- An estimated 800,000 to one million Syrian refugees have a job. Textile-apparel has the biggest share in **manufacturing industries**.
- Apart from one million formal workers, the Turkish textile-apparel industry has an estimated one million workers employed in the informal economy.
- At the **end of 2016**, some 13,298 work permits were given to Syrian nationals. The corresponding figure in early 2017 is 20,000. UNDP Turkey recently stated at the Syria Conference in Belgium that the number of total work permits increased to 36,000. This number includes the entrepreneurs and refugees whose permits were renewed in the second year.
- Some **98 per cent** of Syrian refugees in the textile industry are working in informal conditions without work permits.
- **In 2010** the female participation rate in the job market in Syria was 13 per cent. In Turkey, approximately 17 per cent of Syrian women are working.
- **A male Syrian textile worker** earns approximately 1,000 to 1,100 TL per month, while a female Syrian textile worker earns around 700 TL per month.

In accordance with Turkish law, Syrian refugees are given temporary protection, and since January 2016, Syrian refugees under temporary protection who have been in Turkey for more than six months have been permitted to apply for a work permit. According to the Regulation on Work Permits of Syrians under Temporary Protection:

- Syrian refugees cannot be paid less than the minimum wage.
- There is a maximum refugee workplace quota of ten per cent, meaning the share of refugees in any given workplace cannot exceed 10 per cent of its total workforce.
- 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, enjoying the same rights and liberties.
- They must work in their city of registration. If they find a job in a different city, then they must first re-register themselves in that city.





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