

Business leadership to protect labour rights of Syrian workers in Turkey

The Foreign Trade Association (FTA) is leveraging our 2,000+ membership and global network of influential stakeholders to help fully integrate Syrian workers into Turkish supply chains and protect their labour rights.

The issue

Turkey is on the front line of a humanitarian crisis as the civil war in Syria continues through its sixth year. Neighbouring countries are now hosting more than five million refugees, and Turkey, which has taken in over 2.8 million Syrians, is by far the largest recipient. About 90% of Syrians in Turkey reside outside of refugee camps, with limited access to basic services. Syrians who seek employment are vulnerable to exploitation given their precarious 'temporary protection' status.

Our position

After China, India and Bangladesh, Turkey is the fourth largest sourcing country for FTA members, who source from over 1,900 Turkish producers. Since 2014, FTA and our members have been collaborating with partners and stakeholders to tackle challenges related to Syrians working in Turkish textile factories. Members continue to express deep concerns about reported issues that largely arise from the illegal employment of Syrian nationals. We and our members remain firmly committed to mitigating rights abuses and all forms of exploitation.

FTA believes that employing persons under temporary protection in any factory or farm is not an inherent risk that should be avoided. Rather, it is a good practice and an opportunity to provide sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities.

Protecting workers makes business sense

As well as representing a moral and human rights imperative, protecting the rights of workers is also good for business. By adequately monitoring their supply chains, companies can help ensure the safety and well-being of their workers while mitigating reputational risk. BSCI's Code of Conduct embeds the UN Guiding Principles to help our members monitor and address any potential risks to workers in their supply chains.

What does temporary protection mean?

Turkey retains a geographic limitation to its ratification of the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951), which means non-Europeans, such as Syrians, are only afforded temporary protection status and are not considered refugees.



Our response: collective action

Preventing the abuse and exploitation of Syrian workers in Turkey does not rest on the shoulders of a few. It is a shared responsibility that requires the voice and leadership of all parties involved.

We believe that for real progress, there is need for action on a local and global level — individuals, businesses, governments, employers, worker organisations and civil society need to work in partnership to achieve sustainable change.

Since 2014, FTA members, including participants of the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI), have initiated several proactive measures in Turkey aimed at ensuring safe jobs in dignified working conditions that respect human rights.

The Business Leadership for Migrant and Refugee Rights programme

Eradicating forced labour and worker exploitation requires leadership. FTA is empowering businesses to take the lead in respecting and protecting the rights of their workers throughout their supply chains.

Through training, guidance and impactful partnerships, our members and their producers are moving towards ensuring more responsible business practices.

Overview of FTA actions on Syrians working in Turkey

2017

Briefing session to support the integration of Syrian nationals into the Turkish labour market

On February 20, FTA held a briefing session for BSCI participants, producers, auditing companies and non-members, in collaboration with United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Middle East Peace Research Center (IMPR) Istanbul.

Update of guidance package for companies sourcing in Turkey

An updated Guidance Package was released in March 2017, together with translations in Turkish and Arabic. The package was originally released in August 2016.

'Protection of Syrian Labour Rights in Turkey – A Business Led Call for Supply Chain Action'

On 6 March, FTA brought together BSCI participants UN agencies, think tanks, NGOs, and other relevant parties to launch an initiative to improve the working conditions of Syrians in Turkish supply chains.

FTA calls on Turkish government

On 27 April, FTA, the Fair Labor Association (FLA) and 20 apparel and footwear brands signed a letter to President Erdogan calling for adjustments to the work permit programme to improve conditions for Syrians seeking work in Turkey.



This guidance package is a good example of a private sector initiative aimed to help companies that operate in areas with presence of refugees to understand and identify indicators of risk with regarding labour exploitation and to assist them in implementing due diligence measures to prevent and mitigate labour abuses within their supply chains

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2016

Guidelines for employing Syrian workers

In April, FTA produced guidelines following the Turkish government's guidance documents on the regulation allowing migrant workers to apply for a work permit.

Guidance package

In August, FTA released a Guidance Package to support BSCI participants and their producers in better understanding risks and mitigating the exploitation of Syrians in their supply chains.

2015

Roundtable to leverage better working conditions for migrant workers in Turkey

FTA held a round table in Istanbul to provide updates on national legislation for migrant workers and steps being taken to improve their situation.

Research Project on the Cotton Supply Chain

FTA and BSCI participants joined a multi-stakeholder research project aimed at reaching the lower tiers of the cotton supply chain in Turkey where greater incidents of child labour have been reported.

Collective advocacy urging Turkish authorities to take action

BSCI participants doing business in Turkey signed a letter requesting Turkish authorities to approve a law enabling Syrians to apply for work permits.

2014

Raising Awareness of Labour Abuses in Turkey

FTA provided an update to participants expressing concern about conditions for refugees that have fled Syria to countries such as Turkey.

About FTA

The Foreign Trade Association (FTA) is the leading business association of global commerce, promoting values of international trade and sustainable supply chains. Uniting over 2,000 retailers, importers, brands, and national associations, FTA improves the political and legal framework for trade in a sustainable way. FTA provides the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) to support participants to improve working conditions in factories and farms worldwide. It also provides the Business Environmental Performance Initiative (BEPI) to facilitate improved environmental performance in global supply chains.