

In December of 2016 the Fair Labor Association (FLA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) jointly hosted a roundtable meeting in Istanbul, Turkey to discuss the challenges and opportunities of integrating Syrian refugees into the Turkish labor market.¹ The roundtable attracted 120 participants from international brands sourcing from Turkey, local manufacturers, international and local trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), workers' rights organizations, municipalities, and representatives from Turkish Ministry of Labor & Social Security and the Ministry of the Interior.

These diverse stakeholders shared their perspectives on the legal and economic challenges that Syrian refugees navigate to find work in Turkey, in the months after passage of January 2016 legislation that gave Syrians under temporary protection status the right to apply for work permits. Roundtable participants identified several high-priority steps for multi-national brands sourcing from Turkey to take, to help more Syrian refugees find decent work in the garment industry. Brands can:

- Emphasize to suppliers that they **support the legal employment of refugees**, free from discrimination and in accordance with international labor standards – the same as local workers;
- Introduce **incentives for suppliers employing refugees**, such as placing more orders with refugee-friendly suppliers;
- **Share success stories from suppliers employing refugees**, as positive examples of how brands and suppliers can help improve conditions for Syrians in Turkey; and
- Conduct government **advocacy for legislative revisions** that ease the burden on local suppliers and on refugees, such as a reduction in the cost of the work permit fee, or a revision to allow refugees to work outside their registered city of residency.

In addition to these steps for brands, roundtable participants identified a number of potential action steps recommended for other stakeholders – such as suppliers, civil society organizations, and the Turkish government. This report summarizes the key messages delivered by the day's speakers, and enumerates the potential actions steps identified during the group discussions that followed.

1. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR):

Presentation by Damla Taskin, Livelihoods Officer, UNCHR

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally, or resettle in a third country.

¹ The FLA and UNHCR have collaborated on labor issues in Turkey since June 2016, including the recent publication of brochures (in partnership with the Turkish Ministry of Labor & Social Security and adidas Group) on child labor in the Turkish garment industry: www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/october-2016-child-labor-in-ready-made-garment-and-apparel-industry-english.pdf

In Turkey, the UNHCR works on many different programs and projects designed to support and empower Syrian refugees to become self-sufficient. Its strategic priorities include supporting Syrian refugees' right to work and access to labor markets, enhancing educational opportunities and training programs, and providing an emergency social support network. Recent labor market research by UNCHR in ten cities with high concentrations of Syrian refugees found the textile industry among the most promising for potential employment of Syrians, along with agriculture, and the manufacturing of furniture, auto parts, and machinery.

EMPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY, BY INDUSTRY	
INDUSTRY	%
Textile	30.4
Construction	19.1
Manufacturing	16.3
Agriculture	7.5
Entrepreneur	6.4
Services	5.7
Professional	0.7
Other	13.8

2. The Fair Labor Association:

Presentation by Alpay Celikel, EMEA Regional Manager, FLA

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) is a non-profit multi-stakeholder organization that combines the efforts of industry, non-governmental organizations, colleges, and universities to promote adherence to international labor standards and improve working conditions worldwide. The organization's involvement in working to improve conditions for Syrian refugees includes the publication of several guidance documents for brands sourcing from Turkey since 2014, and a sustained collaborative effort throughout 2015 calling for the government of Turkey to issue legal work permits for refugees.²

Despite the progress made by the introduction of legal work permits for Syrian refugees in 2016, the FLA's presentation identified several remaining barriers to widespread employment of Syrian refugees. For example, the current work permit process allows Syrian refugees to seek employment and receive work permits only in the city where they have first registered as a resident. Also, the work permit fee recently tripled, which creates a disincentive for employers who may otherwise want to hire Syrian refugees. FLA field staff also reported reluctance on the part of some employers to take on a refugee workforce for fear of bad publicity, and identified areas where duplicative efforts by NGOs would benefit from greater coordination to maximize their impact.

The FLA also noted the linguistic barriers faced by Arabic-speaking workers seeking to integrate into a Turkish-speaking workforce, and recommends that employers provide all necessary workplace documents – from employment contracts to health and safety instructions – in workers' own languages, to facilitate work consistent with the FLA Workplace Code of Conduct.

² For details of FLA's activities and publications on Syrian refugees in Turkey, please visit: www.fairlabor.org/report/syrian-refugees-working-turkey.



Berkan Toros (left), UNHCR Associate Program Officer, facilitated the meeting, with presentations by Damla Taskin (UNHCR, center left) and Alpay Celikel (FLA, center right), and opening remarks by Kenan Ercel (right), FLA Workplace Accountability Associate Director.

3. Turkish Labor Agency (ISKUR):

Presentation by Vahap Firat, Director of Istanbul Branch Office, ISKUR

ISKUR, the Turkish Labor Agency, reported that since August 2015 it has been leading the “Economy and Labor Working Group,” one of six working groups organized by the prime minister’s office to coordinate on issues pertaining to Syrian refugees. Currently, ISKUR is helping Syrian refugees register for work permits and obtain career counseling, with future plans to offer entrepreneurial, vocational, and Turkish-language training for refugees. Other plans include providing low-interest loans for employers of Syrian refugees and grants for NGOs working on refugee employment, especially with vulnerable groups like the disabled, young workers, and women.

For the near future, ISKUR’s five main objectives are:

- Organizing vocational trainings and language courses for Syrian refugees in accord with labor market demands;
- Creating entrepreneurship mechanisms for Syrian refugees
- Increasing the service capacity of organizations/institutions working on employment of Syrian refugees
- Combatting informal employment of Syrian refugees
- Integration of Syrian refugees into the labor market

In addition to working with the refugee population, ISKUR is tasked with providing services for local workers already facing a high unemployment rate. ISKUR notes that successful implementation of its action plan is heavily dependent on international and local support from UN organizations, governments, NGOs, and businesses, and actively seeks collaboration with national and international stakeholders on its projects.

4. Ministry of Labor & Social Security and Ministry of the Interior:

Presentations by Mehmet Dogan, International Labour Directorate General, Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MoLSS) and Ahmet Buran, Department of Migration, Ministry of the Interior Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM)

The Ministry of Labor reports that it has issued 4,039 work permits to Syrian refugees under temporary protection since the passage of the January 2016 regulation. This brings the total number of Syrians with work permits to 14, 747, including permits issued to Syrians not living under “temporary protection.”

To receive a permit, a Syrian worker under temporary protection must have received a valid ID and ID number, and must have lived in Turkey under temporary protection for at least six months. The permit can only be issued for – and is valid only in – the city of residency registration. Work permits can be requested online by employers, with physical work permits subsequently sent by mail to workplaces. Exemptions from work permit requirements are available for seasonal agricultural and animal husbandry workers, and for refugees employed by NGOs and foundations working on public interest and humanitarian relief efforts.

Employers may hire Syrian refugees to comprise up to 10 percent of their workforce; however, this limit does not apply if employers were unable to recruit local workers after searching for more than four weeks, or if the refugee applicant is seeking employment in the same workplace where she or

Top Ten Cities With Concentrated Syrian Refugee Populations



he received ISKUR vocational training. All work permit and work permit exemption applications can be completed and tracked via www.calismaizni.gov.tr.

5. Brands Sourcing from Turkey:

Presentation by Olgun Aydin, EMEA Supply Chain Sustainability Manager, Puma; and Enes Un, EMEA Social/Environmental Affairs Director, adidas Group

Although Turkey is not a primary sourcing hub for either adidas Group or Puma, the presenters shared that their top management is fully supportive of advocacy and relief efforts for Syrian refugees. Both brands have collaborated with multi-lateral organizations like the FLA and UNHCR, including on advocacy in favor of the government provision of temporary-protection work permits for Syrian refugees. They have assisted with the publication and distribution to their Turkish suppliers of material explaining the workplace rights of Syrian refugees and regulations on child labor prevention and employment of young workers. They have encouraged their suppliers to employ refugees and encourage other brands heavily sourcing from Turkey to do the same, taking advantage of the legal means through which Syrian refugees are able to become employed, free from discrimination and in accordance with international labor standards – the same as local workers.

6. Garment Manufacturer in Turkey and Syrian Refugee Worker:

Presentation by Meliha Yildirim, HR and Sustainability Manager for SLN Textile

Local Turkish supplier SLN Textile recently applied for and obtained work permits for two Syrian refugees. They successfully identified candidates that have previous textile experience with the assistance of the German company Puma, the UNHCR, and the International Middle East Peace Research Center (IMPR), and they completed the application process with guidance from the FLA. Copies of all employment-related documents were made available in Arabic to SLN Textile's new workers with the help of Puma and the FLA; the new workers had also already become conversant in Turkish, having lived in the country for several years.

SLN Textile brought one of their refugee workers to the meeting to inform participants about his experiences searching for decent work in Turkey. The worker described arriving in Istanbul in 2013, first working in hotels before seeking work in the textile industry. Prior to securing employment with SLN Textile, the worker reported that other factories had turned him away because of his refugee status, or else offered him informal, off-the-books employment with low pay.

7. Group Discussions, Challenges and Opportunities

The individual presentations were followed by small group discussions among the participants. Thanks to the diverse backgrounds of the participants, informative presentations delivered by key stakeholders, and rich group discussions that followed, the FLA and UNHCR gained a better understanding of challenges and opportunities in the employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Group Discussion	
<p><i>Organizers asked participants to compile their observations of the primary challenges and opportunities in the employment of Syrian refugees in Turkey, to inform future collaborations to help them improve their livelihoods. The following compilation represents input from all of the perspectives represented at the meeting.</i></p>	
CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prejudice against refugees among the communities and employers 2. Health and safety related risks in the workplace due to lack of training and language barrier 3. Absence of detailed background information on refugee population regarding their skills, qualifications, job experience, education, training, etc. 4. Lack of awareness among refugees and employers on the requirements of legal employment 5. Geographic limitations (refugees can only work in cities where they are registered) 6. Financial burden of work permits borne by the employer (The annual work permit fee rose from TRY 191 [\$52] to TRY 537.5 [\$146]) 7. Need for annual renewal of the work permit 8. Lack of inspection/monitoring by local authorities to enforce compliance 9. Chronically high unemployment rate in the overall labor market 10. Prevalence of informal employment in sectors like textiles and agriculture where refugees are most likely to work and the overall decline in opportunities for employment in these sectors 11. High social security cost and taxes, which raise the cost of labor for employers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Combatting xenophobia and prejudice through community outreach and other forms of communication and education 2. Regular health and safety training and monitoring implemented by governmental authorities and international brands 3. Creating an online database of skills and qualifications of refugees for prospective employers 4. Dissemination of information regarding the employment of Syrian refugees, among both communities and employers 5. Legislative revision to allow refugees to apply for work permits outside of their city of residency 6. Advocacy for the reduction of work permit fees or subsidy for employers of refugees who must cover this cost 7. Arabic courses on how to obtain the legally required "Vocational Competency Document" 8. More language courses for refugees, with emphasis on technical and professional skills 9. Free-of-charge translator services for the employers 10. More vocational training for Syrian refugees in the areas with the most job prospects 11. Active involvement and support of municipalities in the job seeking process of the refugees, through which they could train and manage other Syrian workers

