

## Supporting Workers' Rights and Mitigating Child Labor Risks in Small and Medium Enterprises in the Garment and Textile Sector in Turkey

*Project Update – September 2019*

### Project Background

FLA's first-hand field experience in Turkey's garment and textile sector indicates that support for internationally recognized worker rights standards is usually limited to Tier 1 suppliers. The upper tiers of the supply chain are often invisible.

A multi-stakeholder project launched in October 2018 goes beyond Tier 1 in the garment and textiles sectors in Turkey to enhance workers' rights with a focus on issues including child labor, occupational health and safety, grievance mechanisms, and compensation.



*Tier 2 Printing Factory Floor*

### Project Partners & Activities



*First Steering Committee Meeting in Ankara.*

The FLA is partnering with the Turkish Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services (MoFLSS), five global companies who operate in Turkey, three Turkish trade unions, and the Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters' Association (IHKIB).

Company partners include adidas, Espirit, New Balance, Nike, and PUMA. The trade union partners are Leather, Weaving, and Textile Workers' Trade Union (DERITEKS), Textile Workers' Trade Union (DISK-Tekstil), and Trade Union of Textile, Knitting, and Apparel Workers (TEKSIF).

Within the framework of the 24-month project, partners meet quarterly in Project Steering Committee meetings to discuss lessons learned and future activities.

At the start of the project, the team collected background information on the dynamics of garment and textile sector in Turkey and common issues faced at different levels of supply chain through a desk-based review. Next, in-depth interviews with representatives of companies, trade unions, and workers were conducted to identify and consider possible risk

areas at small and medium enterprises in the textile and garment sectors, including elements that may increase risk probability, the regulatory framework governing the sector, and stakeholders that may play an active role in addressing identified issues.

The research signaled that working hours, wage and benefits, and occupational health and safety stand out as main risk areas and that stakeholder cooperation and coordination should be encouraged to eliminate risks. Key learnings were compiled in a sectoral background analysis report.

Kick-off meetings were hosted at Tier 1 and Tier 2 factories nominated for participation by project partner brands in advance of baseline assessments and worker demographic profiling research.

For baseline assessment, each Tier 2 factory's system and practice were evaluated from a social compliance perspective based on local law and FLA code requirements. Assessments included field observation and worker interviews. In line with initial research findings, occupational health and safety, working hours, and wages and benefits are issues in the forefront at these factories. A root cause analysis demonstrated that global market pressures for low cost and high-speed production and rise of fast fashion make production planning nearly impossible. The pressure is felt at all levels of supply chain, but Tier 2 factories may be more impacted than Tier 1 workplaces because of their smaller size and production capacity, severe competition, an absence of future order guarantees, and vulnerability in the face of currency volatility.

A worker demographic profiling study was conducted at four factories at the same time as baseline assessment. Demographics and household information were collected via surveys from more than 200 workers. Preliminary data show that most workers are male and Turkish citizens. A majority are between ages 25-45 years old who have completed either primary or middle school. Household data indicated that workers usually live with their nuclear family and half are the household's sole income earner. Most households are indebted to banks, usually for house credits.



*FLA CEO Sharon Waxman visits a project factory.*

## **Next Steps**

In the next period, efforts will be concentrated on building the capacity of stakeholders such as brands, suppliers, and unions. Within the scope of the project's capacity building activities, the FLA will develop training modules and deliver trainings. Simultaneously, the FLA will continue the baseline assessments and worker demographic profiling surveys at select Tier 2 factories.