



Improving Employment Practices in the Turkish Cotton Sector - Towards Decent Working Conditions in Cotton Farms – In Şanlıurfa August 2017 – February 2019



adidas

IKEA
RANGE AND
SUPPLY

INDITEX



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fair Labor Association (FLA) partnered with the İyi Pamuk Uygulamaları Derneği (IPUD) (Good Cotton Practices Association) and companies - Asos, adidas, Nike, Inditex, IKEA, Puma and PVH, sourcing from Turkey, to understand the working conditions in the cotton farms in Turkey. This 19-month project started in the South-Eastern part of Turkey, Şanlıurfa in August 2017 and ended in February 2019.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project worked at 10 cotton farms to, (1) build capacity at farmers, labor contractors and workers, (2) test remediation strategies, (3) pilot farm-level interventions on decent work and recruitment practices. In addition the project, (4) established dialogue with policy makers and other stakeholders at the national and local level, and (5) identified next steps that will inform a sectoral-approach to improving labor standards in cotton farms.

These farmers were selected as they are affiliated to the IPUD and employed permanent, temporary, and seasonal workers. These farmers were eager to improve working conditions at their farms and participate in project activities. The vision is that these farmers would act as ambassadors to disseminate information on good practices to other IPUD and non-IPUD farmers.

PARTNERING WITH COMPANIES

The project did not set out to conducting a top-down tracing of raw materials supply chain but to take a sectoral approach and examine working conditions in

Turkey's cotton sector to identify issues at the farm level, and test risk-mitigation strategies.

The global brands in this project are already involved in several social compliance efforts in the top two tiers of their supply chains (tier 1 and 2). Their close participation in the project provided them with the opportunity to learn about farm level risks and prepare for any immediate or future upstream supply chain disclosure.

They:

- participated in monthly calls and quarterly meetings and offered regular feedback on activities and interventions
- provided legal advice to support the development of workers' contracts
- ensured that documents (workers' contracts, learning package) were accurately translated
- contributed to the development of the survey mapping stakeholders and services
- made recommendations on how to conduct focus group discussions and build links with public institutions to ensure sustainability
- donated clothing to the farmers to be distributed to the workers and their families
- suggested the best ways to deliver dental health screening to farm workers.

The companies intend to pursue advocacy efforts and explore ways to carry out further interventions in Turkey. Thanks to their global reach, they will be able to apply some of the lessons learned in this project in other countries and agricultural sectors.

Employment Issues in Cotton Farming

The two studies conducted in the context of this project highlighted important labor issues, such as:

- 91 percent of workers have no formal contract with their employer.
- 70 percent of workers report working seven days a week and almost half (47 percent) work more than 9 hours a day. Their working time largely exceeds the 45-hour per week prescribed by law.
- Workers are paid below the national minimum wage of 57-59 Turkish Lira (TL). They usually receive 45-50 TL for hoeing and 45-60 TL for harvesting cotton (0.80 TL per kilo of cotton). Daily wages are higher for irrigating the fields: 80 - 200 TL.
- Syrian workers who live in refugee camps earn even less: they are usually paid between 30-35 TL per day.
- The majority of workers (95 percent) only have access to Social Security through formerly known the Green card scheme, designed to help the poorest in Turkish society.
- Lack of fair compensation or living wage: over 60 percent of households reported that their income is insufficient to meet basic needs and barely allows the family to survive.

Project Beneficiaries

- **Labor contractors** who are the agricultural intermediaries supplying workers to the cotton farmers.
- **Permanent workers** with a work contract lasting for 12 months or more.
- **Temporary workers**, either hired for a specific, time-limited task or with work contracts for only 3 to 6 months.
- **Seasonal migrant worker families**, whose main job is seasonal or who are employed as daily workers.
- **Refugees**, mostly Syrians, under temporary protection, who work in the cotton sector.
- **Farmers** cultivating cotton on land that they own or lease.
- **Child labor**, defined as children under the minimum legal age in gainful employment.

Field Level Interventions

- Several permanent and temporary) received training on Decent Work and basic health and safety (142 men, 92 women); Advanced Health & Safety (103 men, 30 women); Effects of pesticide application on human health, Maternal health and reproductive rights (44 men, 41 women); AFAD Disaster management (58 men); Sun hat production (9 men, 59 women); First Aid (73 men, 2 women); First Aid certification (22 men, 2 women).
- In total, the project developed 9 training modules. Training and capacity building activities also targeted farmers, labor contractors, and local stakeholders.
- 9 farms were equipped with round portable umbrellas; fixed tented areas were installed in 8 farms to provide shade to workers and their families during hot summer work.
- 300 workers received specially designed sun hats, based on the traditional headscarf worn in the region; 3 farms that had successfully completed hat production training received full sets of tools and supplies required for the ongoing production of these hats.
- All 10 participating farms were equipped with a first aid box and a fire extinguisher.
- 100 learning packages covering the information provided on decent work principles in the training modules were distributed to permanent and temporary workers.
- 20 Awareness Boards – 10 displaying hotline numbers for emergency and referral services and 10 boards highlighting Health & Safety risks and preventive measures – were distributed to the farms.
- 150 posters raising awareness of child labor and the importance of child education were distributed.
- The project produced 3 reports, including worker demographic profiling, community profiling; and stakeholder mapping.
- Employment contracts were signed with permanent workers in the 10 selected farms.
- In person meetings between ISKUR, farmers and labor contractors and several Info Days were organized.
- SUSKI, the local water authority, conducted analysis of drinking water in the 10 farms, before and after irrigation. One additional analysis was carried out after water treatment and one was handled by a private lab for comparison and verification, bringing the total number of analyses to 22.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engaging with public institutions, non-governmental organizations, and other service is crucial to ensure that a time-limited project has a lasting impact. Efforts to engage with national and local actors focused on raising awareness of the need to improve employment practices and working conditions in cotton farms.

To ensure the sustainability of interventions, project staff visited local civil society organizations and service providers, and enlisted their support for project activities and interventions. These include the multi-purpose community centers ÇATOM, involved in the production of the special sun hats, Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management agency AFAD, which provided training, partnership declaration with ISKOD, conversation with GAP, water authorities SUSKI to conduct water testing, as well as civil social organizations.

During capacity building sessions, the Chamber of Agriculture in Şanlıurfa, the main public interlocutor for the farming community, was briefed on decent work principles, the employment contracts for agricultural workers and the comprehensive training manual, covering all training modules, developed in the context of this project as well as other project interventions. Dent Dentists, working on a health project supported by a national foundation, visited the cotton farms and conducted dental health screening, and distributed dental hygiene and care kits.

LESSONS LEARNED

Given the short timeframe and limited resources of the project, all decent work areas could not be fully addressed as some of the issues on decent work and recruitment processes are systemic, deeply rooted in social norms and require continuous multi-year effort.

The project provided several key lessons for future interventions. These include:

1. Understanding the target beneficiaries and the socio-economic context is crucial

The Worker Demographic Profiling study provided fine-grained data on the workers and their families. The findings of these studies informed the design of activities and interventions, and ensured that they met the needs of the target beneficiaries. Interventions must take into account social norms, gender bias,

language, and religious background. For instance training session were organized separately for men and women, in Kurdish and Arabic, and local trainers used visual elements in the trainings. Farmers and labor contractors was involved in an action based learning to become active agents of change.

2. Engaging with government at local and national level is important

Support from national government level eases access to local authorities, who are often more willing to start a discussion and provide resources if directed by the national government. Concentrating the project in one geographical area and involving the public agencies in activities and training programs facilitated their buy-in.

3. Multi-stakeholder collaboration maximizes impact

Issues like child labor are deeply rooted in the social fabric and can only be addressed effectively through sustained efforts from the government, civil society, and private sector. Collaboration between private sector companies and civil society organizations increases the impact of advocacy efforts. Government officials are more likely to consider policy changes when major economic actors are involved in the lobbying efforts.

4. Next Steps – scaling up and replicating activities and interventions

Several activities undertaken as part of this project, such as the **Worker Profiling** study can be widely replicated. The comprehensive **Learning Package**, **Contract Templates** and **Awareness Boards** can now be disseminated more widely in Turkey. **Peer-to-Peer interactions** can be facilitated amongst farmers. Ongoing **Info Days** can be organized for farmers, labor contractors and workers on available social services and regulations. With enough time and resources, an area-based approach to reducing child labor, could result in the establishment of a **Child Labor Free Zone** (CLFZ). Incentives, encouragements, policies are required to sustain the interventions at the farm level and to support disseminations at scale.

Achieving lasting change will require sustained efforts and long-term engagement with the farming community to emphasize the importance of investing in human capital.