



# IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IN THE TURKISH COTTON SECTOR

Towards  
Decent Working  
Conditions  
in Cotton Farms  
in Şanlıurfa

## LESSONS LEARNED REPORT

Prepared by Fair Labor Association

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# I. INTRODUCTION

**The Fair Labor Association (FLA) and İyi Pamuk Uygulamalari Dernegi (IPUD)** (Good Cotton Practices Association), a strategic partner of the Better Cotton Initiative in Turkey, in 2017 launched “Improving Employment Practices in the Turkish Cotton Sector—Toward Decent Working Condition in Cotton Farms in Şanlıurfa,” a project in partnership with seven global brands—adidas, Asos, IKEA Range and Supply, Inditex, Nike, Puma and PVH—sourcing apparel and other cotton products in Turkey.

Two earlier interventions conducted in Turkey’s cotton sector were the foundation for the project. In 2016, the FLA and IPUD led a project supported by H&M and Inditex. FLA conducted train-the-trainer workshops on decent work and observed training for workers and farmers delivered by IPUD. The project brought to light possible improvements that could be executed at the farm-level, such as collecting systematic information about worker’s demographics; strengthening interface with labor contractors (a critical entity in the worker recruitment process); engagement with government stakeholders; and testing child labor mitigation strategies. A second project, with seven garment companies doing business in the Netherlands, focused on cotton supply chain mapping from Tier 1 (cut, make, trim) to the cotton farms<sup>1</sup>. Each project concluded that farm-level interventions, with the involvement of local stakeholders, are required to advance decent work and worker recruitment practices.

The 2017 project design included a sectoral approach to examine working conditions in Turkey’s cotton sector, identify issues at the farm level, and test risk-mitigation strategies. The global brands involved in this project as

partners are already involved in several social compliance efforts in the top tiers (Tier 1 and Tier 2) of their supply chains. Their involvement in this project offered the opportunity to better understand farm-level risks and prepare for immediate or future upstream supply chain discourse.

Turkey is the seventh largest producer of cotton in the world<sup>2</sup>. The International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) estimates that Turkey produced 792,000 tons of lint cotton in the 2017-18 season, which amounts to approximately three percent of world production<sup>3</sup>. Turkey also imports as much cotton as it produces. Cotton production in Turkey, concentrated in three main regions: the Aegean, Çukurova, and Southeast Anatolia. Şanlıurfa province, located in Southeast Anatolia, accounts for more than 40 percent of national cotton production, according to Turkey’s statistical institute TurkStat. It is one of the regions where cotton farming is least mechanized.

During the harvest season, in particular, thousands of temporary workers, often entire families, toil for long hours in extreme heat under a relentless sun. Most workers are hired through agricultural intermediaries and do not have an employment contract. While employed on cotton farms, the seasonal workers often work over eight hours a day, seven days a week. This project focused primarily in the Şanlıurfa region because it is considered a high-risk area from a labor standards perspective.

1 [http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/child\\_labor\\_in\\_cotton\\_supply\\_chains\\_june\\_2017.pdf](http://www.fairlabor.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/child_labor_in_cotton_supply_chains_june_2017.pdf)

2 <https://businessfinancearticles.org/cotton-producing-countries>

3 [https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Cotton%20and%20Products%20Annual\\_Ankara\\_Turkey\\_3-23-2018.pdf](https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Cotton%20and%20Products%20Annual_Ankara_Turkey_3-23-2018.pdf)

## II. PROJECT OVERVIEW

**The FLA-IPUD project** ran from August 2017 to February 2019 with the aim of providing insight into employment practices and working conditions at the field level in Turkey's cotton sector and piloting interventions to address the labor rights gaps.

Specifically, the project included five objectives:

- 1) Build capacity at the local level
- 2) Test remediation strategies
- 3) Pilot farm-level interventions on decent work and recruitment practices
- 4) Dialogue with policymakers and other stakeholders at the national and local levels
- 5) Identify next steps that will inform a sectoral-approach to improving labor standards in cotton farms.

To achieve these aims, the project workplan included the following activities: conduct worker profiling research to gain a deeper understanding of the workforce and the

### 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.

workers' needs; complete community profiling and services mapping to gain insights into workers' social and economic environment and



**Collaboration:** *At adidas, collaboration is part of our DNA and we have been collaborating with a range of stakeholders from UN agencies to NGOs and others for several years in the EMEA region. This project is another notable example of the power of collaboration and how crucial it is for driving positive change at scale.*

**Field level empowerment:** *Empowering people in the field whether workers, intermediaries, farmers, and others are key to sustain compliance. The training opportunities and information sharing sessions provided to seasonal workers, labor contractors, farmers and producer units in the project location (Sanliurfa) not only raised awareness on decent working conditions but also enabled them to own and govern program compliance.*

— **Enes Ün**, Director, Social & Environmental Affairs, EMEA



available services; provide training to workers, farmers, and labor contractors to build capacity at the local level; pilot farm-level interventions to improve working conditions and prevent child labor; test remediation strategies based on identification of identify issues related to working conditions; and establish a dialogue with government stakeholders.

Around Şanlıurfa many agricultural activities, from planting to harvesting, are carried out by temporary or seasonal workers, usually hired through labor contractors. The agricultural intermediaries play a crucial role in the recruitment process, including handling worker transportation, contract negotiations, and the settlement of workers' compensation.

Sixty percent of workers are from surrounding villages, while 31 percent live in towns and cities. Fifteen percent of workers residing in the city center have been settled for more than 15 years, while 18 percent have been city dwellers for five

years. Nine percent, mostly migrant workers from Syria, live in tents while employed on the farms.<sup>4</sup>

In many cases, several members of the same household, sometimes including children, work in the fields. Because they are only able to collect their wages at the end of the season, workers may be vulnerable to forced labor. Often, families turn to labor contractors for loans during the winter months when no jobs are available.

Many workers employed in the cotton farms of Şanlıurfa are from the Southeast region where employment opportunities outside agriculture are scarce. In recent years, Syrians who fled the conflict in their homeland to seek refuge in Turkey have joined the agricultural workforce.

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from Worker Demographic Profiling study, conducted as part of this project during the September - October 2017 harvest.



## adidas, Asos, IKEA RANGE AND SUPPLY, Inditex, Nike, Puma, and PVH actively supported the implementation of this project.

**Company representatives** visited participating farms, attended training sessions, and met with local institutions and non-governmental organizations. They also:

- 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

- Recommended 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. Due to their global reach, they will be able to apply some of the lessons learned in other countries and agricultural sectors.

## PROJECT IMPACT SNAPSHOT

**Nine training modules** were developed as part of the project. Training and capacity building activities also targeted farmers, labor contractors and local stakeholders

- Nine farms were equipped with round portable umbrellas; fixed tented areas were installed at eight farms to provide shade to workers and their families during the summer months.
- 300 workers received specially designed sun hats, based on the traditional headscarf worn in the region; three farms received full sets of tools and supplies required for the ongoing production of these hats after successfully completing hat production training
- All 10 participating farms were equipped with a first aid box and a fire extinguisher.
- 100 learning packets 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 and safety risks and preventive measures—were distributed to the farms.
- 150 posters on child labor and the importance of child education were distributed.
- Three reports were produced: worker demographic profiling, community profiling and stakeholder mapping.
- 24 permanent workers from 10 farms for the first time signed written employment contracts.
- One in-person meeting between ISKUR, farmers and producer units (ginning factories) was organized. The project facilitated meetings between ISKUR and the three labor contractors providing workforce at three farms. As a result, all three labor contractors registered with ISKUR.
- SUSKI, the local water authority (public organization operates under the Metropolitan Municipality), conducted an analysis of drinking water in the 10 farms, before and after irrigation. (Testing was conducted by a private lab, too.) The water sources were found to be highly contaminated by pathogens, chemicals, pesticides. Most contaminated wells (drinking water sources) were treated by the automatic chlorination machine of SUSKI. Still, chlorination was not effective on some chemicals (e.g. nitrate and ammonium—that came into the underground water due to indiscriminate spraying of chemicals in the fields) and needs further interventions.

## III. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

**A wide range** of activities and interventions were implemented during the 19-month project period.

### Research Activities

The following studies shaped the activities and interventions piloted in the project. The information they produced on workers' needs, existing resources, and gaps in services may be the basis for longer-term advocacy efforts and the design of future interventions and remediation activities.

- A worker profiling study was conducted at 36 cotton farms (both IPUD-affiliated and non-affiliated) around Şanlıurfa to create a profile of workers and working conditions in cotton farms. The research took place in two stages, during the irrigation period in September 2017 and the harvest in October 2017. The survey, covering 59 households and 397 individuals, yielded crucial information about the extent of child labor, the workforce gender composition, and the difficult living and working conditions faced while cotton farming.
- A community profiling and services map was shared with the participating companies. FLA conducted the mapping exercise in 2017 in the Eyyübiye district of Şanlıurfa, where many seasonal agricultural workers live and over 70 percent of the residents are under the age



of 30. The exercise sought to gain a deeper understanding of the worker community and its needs and revealed entrenched poverty, debt cycles, lack of vocational skills, and limited job opportunities outside agriculture. This cycle forces successive generations to accept the hardship of seasonal agricultural work and creates fertile ground for child labor, perceived as a necessity for the family.

- A stakeholder map produced a list of civil society organizations operating at the grassroots level and other actors, including government agencies and individuals, working to prevent child labor and promote good employment practices.

## Training and Capacity Building

Training and capacity building activities, aimed at workers, farmers, and agricultural intermediaries, formed a major part of this project. Training activities often happened in challenging field environments with limited resources. Project activities were limited to the period from May 2018 to October 2018, a peak time when most workers were present in the fields.

The project team developed training modules covering nine topics guided by the findings of the profiling surveys.

## EMPLOYMENT ISSUES IN COTTON FARMING

The two studies conducted in the context of the project revealed critical insights.

- 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 nine hours a day. Work 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 less than native workers. Typically, they are paid between 30-35 TL per day.
- The majority of workers (95 percent) have access to Social Security only through the former Green Card scheme, which was designed to help the poorest in Turkish society.
- Over 60 percent of households reported that their income is insufficient to meet basic needs and barely allows their families to survive.

## WORKER TRAINING

Project training sessions reached numerous farm workers, including 95 percent of permanent workers, 65 percent of temporary workers and 18 percent of daily workers.

MODULE	NUMBER TRAINED	MEN	WOMEN
Decent Work and health and safety	234	142	92
Advanced health and safety	183	103	33
Effects of pesticides application	85	44	41
Disaster management	58	58	0
Sun hat production	68	9	59
First aid	75	73	2
First aid certification	24	22	2



*Training being provided by AFAD on fire disaster management*



*Health and safety training at the field level.*



*Information Days organized with ISKUR for ginning factories, labor contractors and farmers.*

- Decent work, covering child labor, recruitment practices and safe transportation, provided to farmers, workers and labor contractors by project staff.
- Health and safety, including basic and advanced information, conducted by a specialist.
- Effects of pesticide exposure and protection, conducted by local doctors.
- Sexual and reproductive health, maternal health and child development, and dental health, provided by medical professionals.
- Disaster prevention and action incorporating fire drills, search and rescue, and earthquake protection, conducted by a disaster prevention specialist from AFAD, Turkey's disaster and emergency management agency.
- Ministry of Health First Aid Certification Program, completed by permanent workers from each participating farm who received a first aid certificate.

In addition, the project ran a capacity building program for the Chamber of Agriculture in Şanlıurfa, a crucial interlocutor for the cotton farming community. The purpose was to raise awareness of working conditions and employment issues in cotton farming, including child labor.

Farmers and representatives of cotton ginning factories, during “information days,” had an opportunity to come together with officials from ISKUR, Turkey's employment agency.



## Field Level Interventions

Several interventions were tailored to improve employment practices and mitigate the risks of child labor and forced labor. For example:

- Decent work learning packet distribution provided information on child labor, workers' rights, legal requirements and included a registration manual for agricultural intermediaries.
- Written agreements (contracts) between farmers and permanent workers, farmers and temporary workers, farmers and agricultural intermediaries were developed and introduced during farm visits. Sample contracts, as well as guidelines for their use, were distributed to workers, farmers, and labor contractors.
- Meetings with farmers to discuss employment contracts. Farmers were encouraged to create more structured working environments, run their farms as agricultural enterprises, and adopt business-like practices, such as keeping lists of workers.

## Portraits from the Cotton Fields: THE FARMER

**Mustafa Bülbül** has been engaged in a large family farm since 2006. As an agricultural engineer, he employs 130 workers. During the harvest season, he hires some 300 daily workers for a 15-to 20-day period.

Already producing better cotton, the farmer has a clear vision for the future: he wants to become a trusted supplier to multinational firms.

"Global companies want to be sure we are providing decent working conditions," he said. "But for us, it is also about caring for the environment and addressing social issues."

He acknowledges growing sensitivity to child labor, which is still an issue in the region and traditionally was not considered a problem.

"Preventing child labor is a priority for major companies and the Turkish state," he said.

For him, the FLA-IPUD project provided an opportunity to raise working standards.

"We wanted to prevent child labor, improve working standards, and raise the reputation of the family business," he said.

Bülbül completed all nine of the training modules provided by the project with his workers. Thirteen of his permanent workers were encouraged to pass on the knowledge they acquired to other workers.

The project resulted in other important changes on the farm.

"Before the first aid training, we had to bring injured workers to the city when there was an accident. Now permanent workers can administer first aid on the spot," he says.

Workers have started using protective equipment such as masks and gloves. They are benefitting from shaded areas where they can seek shelter from the sun. Most importantly, after joining the project, Bülbül has started signing contracts with his workers that detail workers' earnings and working conditions.

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*The pilot has been crucial in building an understanding of the issues faced by cotton workers in the Şanlıurfa region of Turkey. Tailor-made solutions specific to each worker and their family have led to concrete and meaningful improvements in the working conditions and the wellbeing of workers. Collaboration and engagement with a number of local authorities has meant that the lessons learned through this pilot can now be scaled up to reach more beneficiaries.*

— **Begüm Tute Selvi**, Inditex Sustainability Turkey, Projects Manager

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Several field-level interventions produced solutions to provide decent working conditions for the workers:

- Research to find equipment to protect workers and their families from extreme heat. Two types were identified as suitable for use in the fields: a round umbrella, easily portable, providing 16 meter square of shade and a lightweight, sun-proof type of fixed or portable tent measuring 4x5 meters.
- The development of a new sun hat combining the headscarf traditionally worn by local women with a protective sun visor. Sun hats can be made with readily available materials and do not require sewing. The Parmaksiz ÇATOM (Multi-Purpose Community Center) produced 300 hats for distribution to the workers. Male and female workers on the 10 selected farms were taught how to make the protective headgear. Hat production could be an activity for worker families to earn income during the winter months.
- Analysis of drinking well water, before and after irrigation, to assess the potential health risks posed by intensive pesticide applications and use of chemical fertilizer. The analysis was conducted in the laboratories of the water authority SUSKI. A reference laboratory compared and verified results. Drinking water was found to be contaminated. Chlorination proved inadequate. Further research needs to be conducted to assess other water purification methods.



*Fixed tent for sun protection*



*Development of user friendly sun-hats and training of workers to self-produce the hats by Parmaksiz ÇATOM.*



Risk mitigation interventions were also part of the project.

- The display of awareness boards at all participating farms. The boards presented emergency and referral service descriptions and contact information (“hotlines”) as well as hazard identification information and risk prevention measures.
- The distribution of first aid boxes and fire extinguishers to all farms.

## Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging with public institutions, non-governmental organizations and others, is crucial to ensure that a time-limited project has a lasting impact. Stakeholder engagement is a corner-stone of FLA's methodology to drive systematic improvements, and efforts focused on raising awareness of improving employment practices and working conditions in cotton farms among national and local actors.



Display of Awareness Boards at farms with hotline numbers, referral services and risk prevention measures.

Beşir	110	Medikal Tesisat-Kuruluşlar (0312) 333 11 11	102
Polis İstasyonu	155	Atatürk Anıtı	106
Acil Tıbbiye	112	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	174
Ortopedi ve Travmatoloji	167	Ticari Sicil	181
Genel Tıp	156	Atatürk Anıtı	444 1 191
Genel Tıp	114	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	130
Genel Tıp	117	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	140
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	183	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	444 1 191
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	171	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	139
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	134	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	138
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	130	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	176
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	130	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	130
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	136	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	162
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	185	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	185
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	185	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	136
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	116	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	121
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	122	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	130
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	176	Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	137
Atatürk Anıtı'nın Etrafında	188		

## Portraits from the Cotton Fields: THE PERMANENT WORKER

**Mehmet Emin Barış** has been working on Mustafa Bülbül's farm for the past 12 years. He is now a supervisor, monitoring all agricultural activities from planting to irrigation, hoeing to harvesting. His wife and two of his eight children—a daughter aged 20 and a son aged 25—are also employed on the farm.

Bariş attended all of the training sessions conducted during the project. He found the module on reproductive health particularly informative. His wife joined the hat-making program, where workers were taught to make sun-protection headgear modeled on the traditional headscarves worn by women in the region, with a large visor to protect against the relentless sun. He took part as well.

Information provided on decent work, health and safety, first aid as well as the fire safety led to changes on the farm. Barış has a new responsibility now, which is supervising workers to ensure they are using masks when they handle chemicals or dispose of empty pesticide containers.

Workers are now more cautious about handling empty pesticide containers.

“Thanks to the FLA-IPUD project, working conditions have changed,” he said. “I signed a contract with Mustafa Bey. We are now making contracts with the daily workers as well.”

These are evenly divided between local residents and Syrians, Barış said, adding that they all now receive the same daily wages. Since the project began, the farm stopped hiring underage workers.

Workers are now more aware of their rights and believe that they deserve decent working conditions, included hats and shaded areas to protect against the sun, but not all of them understand the benefit of securing a legal agreement with the farmer who employs them, Baris said.

“Some workers are afraid to sign the document. They worry that they will have to pay tax.”

Syrian workers are also hesitant, concerned that they will stop receiving humanitarian aid if they have a work contract.



Meetings with farmers and local public institutions provided information about existing policies and labor-oriented services.

Experts from Turkey's employment agency, ISKUR, spoke about regulations, employment incentives, occupational training programs and employment guarantee programs for farmers and cotton ginning factories. The employment agency also outlined the procedure that labor contractors should follow to register with the authorities and operate legally.

Project staff visited local civil society organizations and service providers and enlisted their support for project activities and interventions to ensure sustainability. Project staff meetings included:

- Multipurpose community centers ÇATOM, involved in the production of the special sun hats.
- Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management agency AFAD, involved in providing training on disaster management (e.g. fire drill, earthquake drill).
- A partnership declaration with a local non-governmental organization (with doctors on its governance board) focusing on health projects to deliver reproductive health and maternal health training.
- GAP Regional Development Administration to seek support from ÇATOM.
- Water authority SUSKI, to conduct water testing, treatment and reporting the results.

## Portraits from the Cotton Fields: THE LABOR CONTRACTOR

**Mehmet Kahraman**, 33, has worked as an agricultural intermediary for over 10 years, alongside four members of his family. During the agricultural season, he provides workers to as many as 30 farms of various sizes. The farms produce a variety of crops such as almonds, sour cherries, lentils, chickpeas, corn, and cotton.

Getting involved in the FLA-IPUD project has radically transformed the way he conducts his business. Labor contractors traditionally collected a 10 percent commission from the workers' wages. A law adopted in 2010 banned the practice, required agricultural intermediaries to register with ISKUR, Turkey's Employment Agency, and provide a list of workers they hire.

In reality, few labor contractors have signed up in his district and many still follow the traditional practice of deducting a share of the workers' income for their services. "Before the project, I was not aware of the need to register. Access to information is a problem. During the season, we spend our time in the fields and civil servants cannot reach us." With help from the FLA-IPUD project team, he was able to clear the bureaucratic hurdles that the registration process entails.

His income now comes from the farmers who hire him to provide workers, secure their transportation and clean water supply, and supervise them during the period of employment.

"Now the workers know their rights. They sign papers daily and they know exactly how much their wages are."

The labor contractor applies the best practices outlined in the comprehensive training package developed by the project team.

The transition to a different role in the agricultural supply chain has brought some challenges. Since he stopped hiring underage workers, his pool of workers shrunk from between 300 to 350 to 150.

"When we don't accept child workers, they go to other labor contractors who are not registered. It is affecting our work," he said. "Workers are not aware that we provide better working conditions."

Mehmet Kahraman has no doubt that opting to operate legally was the right decision. "We feel freer and more comfortable," he said. "Everything is written and legal." His new status has also led to a new job opportunity, providing agricultural workers to a multinational company that demands high working standards.

- The Chamber of Agriculture in Şanlıurfa, the main public interlocutor for the farming community, received briefings on decent work principles, the employment contracts for agricultural workers and the comprehensive training manual developed in the context of this project.
- Dent Dentists, who are 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.

The FLA and IPUD recognized the efforts of the Turkish Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, cotton producers, project partners and project beneficiaries at the project capstone event in Şanlıurfa. The event highlighted the importance of collaboration between stakeholders and outlined the lessons learned from the project. The 150 attendees, representing public services at the province and district levels, nonprofits, and civil society organizations, exhibited enthusiasm and passion for bringing about positive changes in the working conditions of seasonal migrant workers and mitigating child labor risks.



*Project-end stakeholder meeting held in Şanlıurfa*

## Portraits from the Cotton Fields: THE VOLUNTEER TRAINER

Employed as a Health and Safety adviser at a cotton-ginning factory in Şanlıurfa, **Ali Fuat Beldek** agreed to work as a trainer on the project, even volunteering some of his services. At first, he observed workers in the fields and identified risky behavior such as workers perched on a tractor or workers handling pesticides without protection.

Teaching adults and changing deeply ingrained traditional practices is not easy, Beldek said. He found that using visual materials, rather than text-based documents, improved learning. He started with a basic course, before advancing to the next level. Some workers were initially reluctant to believe masks were needed when handling chemicals, but a doctor emphasized the risks when teaching workers about the effects of pesticide applications on human health.

When participants were later tested, 70 percent were found to have understood what they were taught. Gradually, workers adopted a more cautious approach when performing agricultural activities, Beldek said.

“At first, I was not sure we would be successful. It was the first time H&S training was given in the field and to workers speaking several languages (Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic),” he said. “But the team was very supportive. I believe we got good results.”

Over time, the trainer observed that workers took more precautions and altered their practices.

“We also gave them information about workers’ legal rights. Employers also attended these training sessions,” he said.

In the past, workers sometimes bought protective equipment themselves, but they learned that the law requires employers to provide protective gear.

“At the beginning, farmers were reluctant, but they understood their legal responsibilities,” he said.

Farmers and factories are also increasingly aware that improving working conditions is good for business, the trainer believes.

“Many cotton factories now know that when they apply good standards, they get a higher price for their cotton and they can work with better customers,” he said.

## IV. CHALLENGES

**Deeply rooted issues**, such as child labor, require time and cooperation across communities. Child labor, especially, is intricately linked with other social problems, such as poverty, lack of decent jobs, low level or quality of education. These must be addressed through multi-level interventions and policy change that requires determination by the government, civil society, and the private sector.

- As the worker profiling and community profiling surveys from this project revealed, many seasonal worker households do not earn sufficient income in spite of working long hours in difficult conditions. Eliminating child labor involves challenging social norms. While awareness of the harms of child labor is spreading, more time, resources, and concerted efforts are needed to make progress on the issue.
- Syrians are allowed to work in seasonal agriculture, but they must apply for a work permit exemption. They are often reluctant to do so, out of concern that they will lose access to humanitarian aid. Farmers are required by law to register all their workers, but they do

not always do so. The majority of workers are employed informally. Refugees often face discrimination and receive lower wages than local daily workers, who already earn less than the legal minimum. Some of these areas need to be tackled through continuous engagement with local government authorities.

- Public services do not match legal requirements, often because of scarce resources. Turkish law demands that agricultural intermediaries be registered and supply lists of the workers they hire, many labor contractors are unaware of the regulations. Those who attempt to comply often face bureaucratic obstacles. This project made it easier for farmers, labor contractors and workers to access services by mapping services, but sustained lobbying and advocacy efforts will be required to eliminate obstacles. The extensive training program developed by the project staff sensitized the farming community to decent work principles. These messages must be reinforced and disseminated more widely to result in broader and lasting change.

## V. LESSONS LEARNED

### ► Understanding the target beneficiaries and the socio-economic context is vital

**The worker profiling study** provided fine-grain data on the workers and their families. The study findings informed the design of the activities and interventions increasing the likelihood they would meet the needs of the target audiences.

- Interventions must take into account social norms, gender bias, language and religious background. For instance, training sessions were organized separately for women and for men.



- Creating employment opportunities for adults outside the agricultural season would serve to reduce child labor. Parents sometimes feel that children's work is needed to ensure the family's economic survival. Linking workers to off-season income opportunities such as silk production and vocational training for youth may mitigate child labor.
- Language can be a barrier to learning. Workers employed in cotton farms speak Turkish, Kurdish, or Arabic. In some places, training was provided in Kurdish and Arabic, but not Turkish.
- Use of local trainers builds a better understanding between trainers and participants. Local trainers can deliver training in a community's common language.
- Integrating visual elements into training materials and awareness boards may help the learning process, particularly among less literate workers. Providing laminated information cards ensures the durability of these materials in field conditions.
- Building the capacity of farmers and labor contractors through adoption of an action-based learning approach allows them to become active agents of change, rather than passive



recipients of information. Designing training modules to include hands-on experiments and activities enhances their impact.

- Child-friendly spaces can be offered during training sessions. Set working hours are needed to ensure that women can fully focus on learning and engage in other activities. Within the project, efforts were made to identify a suitable location (near a cluster of farms or in individual farms, or in the village center); type of infrastructure (permanent, overlapping with government-run community centers, a semi-permanent or mobile trailer); equipment (toys, books, furniture, child friendly materials, etc.); and childcare (qualification of a person to oversee the children), yet no safe space was established within the project scope due to time limitation.

## ► Engage with the government at the local and national levels

- Engaging with national and local authorities is important. National government support eases access to local authorities, who may be more willing to start a discussion and provide resources if directed by the national government. Support of the central authorities facilitated dialogue with the provincial branches of government agencies.
- Concentrating the project on one geographical area made it easier to get buy-in from the local authorities. There was greater willingness by local officials to engage with the project team because several large area farms fell under their responsibility.
- Talking to local authorities and government leaders and involving public agencies in

activities and training programs should be a priority for private sector companies and non-governmental organizations. Government agencies can implement activities that improve employment and agricultural practices in cotton farming.

- Most public services are not fully mobilized to fulfill their mandates. Increasing the mobilization of public services is crucial to ensure agricultural workers have access. Government agencies should be encouraged to adopt a more proactive approach and make services more accessible.
- A solid understanding of the duties and jurisdiction of public institutions makes it possible to leverage existing government programs (such as the employment agency or the disaster and emergency management agency) to improve employment practices and working conditions. Solutions can be developed in cooperation with government bodies when local resources are limited. For instance, the local water authority carried out water testing. The project supplied

fire extinguishers to the local emergency management agency, which provided fire prevention and safety training.

- Farmers and workers often lack access to public services. Often, they are not aware of the services delivered by government institutions nor those provided by civil society organizations. The project staff worked with local authorities to promote existing services among farmers and workers. A service-oriented model that connects local service providers with beneficiaries increases the sustainability and success of interventions.
- Civil society organizations, like IPUD and FLA, can play a crucial role as facilitators bringing farmers in contact with public institutions and public services such as employment, health, and water treatment. Project staff provided hands-on support to farmers stressing the importance of water testing, shaded areas, reproductive health, and employment contracts with labor intermediaries and workers. Staff connected farmers and labor contractors with the relevant local services.

### ► **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 the 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 advocacy.

### ► **Next steps: scaling and replicating activities and interventions**

Significant issues, including child labor, exist in the cotton sector in Şanlıurfa. This project served to identify and increase awareness around working conditions and employment

practices and resulted in concrete steps to improve the situation for workers. Lasting change will require sustained efforts and long-term engagement with the farming community.

- Many of the activities and interventions undertaken as part of this project, such as the worker profiling study or the learning package, can be widely replicated. They apply beyond Turkey and cotton farming and may be adapted to other agricultural sectors around the world.
- The comprehensive learning package developed as part of the project can be disseminated widely in Turkey and serve as an example for similar packages elsewhere.
- Peer-to-peer interaction creates momentum for change. For example, after farmers visited a model farm that provides good accommodation for workers and a play area for children, they became more engaged and open to learning.
- The awareness boards on display at the farms served as constant reminders to the farmers of their responsibilities to ensure workers and their families are aware of workplace policies. This awareness-building model can be applied in different ways, such as wall paintings or banners in key transit locations for workers and can be easily utilized in other sectors and settings.
- The provision of child-friendly spaces to prevent child labor among seasonal agricultural workers requires a concentrated area of intervention. This could be achieved in the future by providing child-friendly services not just at cotton farms, but to other agricultural sectors or local households. Adopting a broader approach would avoid the risk of merely displacing child labor from one agricultural commodity to another.
- Support for a geographic-based approach to reducing child labor could result in the establishment of a Child Labor Free Zone in some cotton (and other agriculture producing areas).
- Workers have limited access to information, services, and judicial and non-judicial grievance mechanisms. Workers are not aware about the existence of government programs and other services or how to use them. Generally, workers have low awareness about their rights. The absence of active workers' organizations in the agriculture sector limits workers' access. Services such as the FLA's worker voice application could be tested and made available to workers.
- Incentives, encouragements, and policies are required to sustain the interventions at the farm level and to support dissemination at scale.

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*This project has successfully contributed to Fair Labor Association's work to improve workers' lives and confirms the need for greater transparency in the upper tiers of supply chains. The FLA is proud to be a part of this collective effort in Turkey's cotton sector bringing together brands, local partners, and IPUD to develop a model that achieves decent working conditions and can be replicated in other parts of the world and across other agricultural crops*

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— Sharon Waxman, CEO and President, Fair Labor Association