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Temiz Giysi Kampanyası

Adil ve sürdürülebilir bir tekstil sektörü için



THE IMPACT OF THE EARTHQUAKE ON TEXTILE AND GARMENT WORKERS

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Image: Mete Caner Arican

We were called a week after the earthquake. They said they would arrange a place for us to stay. We started working with 30 people. They said there was no place to stay. Overtime was enforced. Despite being an expert chief in my field, my work area was constantly changed. I was subjected to threats by the managers. They asked me to resign after our argument. I didn't, and one week later, I was given my termination.



The earthquake exacerbated the already challenging working conditions and widespread violations of workers' rights in the industry.

Executive Summary

Through interviews with 130 workers, we collected both qualitative and quantitative data, which reveal the heavy toll on workers when brands fail to fulfil their supply chain responsibilities.

The region that was hit by the February 2023 earthquake in Türkiye plays a significant role in the country's textile and garment production. In this region, both garment and textile producers operate factory-scale workplaces, many of which supply well-known global apparel brands. Following the devastating earthquake, we undertook research to understand how the earthquake response of global brands, which have declared their labor rights and ethical supply chain commitments, affected the garment workers in their supply chains. In this report, we first provide an overview of the general production conditions in the region before the earthquake, based on existent research.

We then draw from the results of our primary quantitative and qualitative worker survey (n = 130) to analyze: **1) the experiences of workers and**

employers immediately after the earthquake, and 2) the working conditions, workload, working hours, and violations of rights that workers experienced in the months following the earthquake.

Through interviews with 130 workers, we collected both qualitative and quantitative data, which reveal the heavy toll on workers when brands fail to fulfil their supply chain responsibilities. The final section of the report includes policy recommendations for the brands mentioned by workers, and the textile and garment sector in general. The earthquake exacerbated the already challenging working conditions and widespread violations of workers' rights in the industry. However, steps could have been – and should be – taken to mitigate the impact of the earthquake and ensure that workers' rights are respected.

Introduction

02

How did textile and garment companies producing for global brands, including global supply chains, manage their relationships with workers during and after the earthquake?

Interviews with workers at Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya and Adıyaman in between August-September 2023

It is clear that the earthquake has had a fundamental impact on the textile and garment sector in the region. Open Supply Hub shows that there were thousands of production facilities in the area affected by the earthquakes; of these most were apparel, textile, footwear, leather, or apparel accessories facilities.¹ After the earthquake on February 6, media reports highlighted the lack of structural safety in factories in the earthquake zone, cases of employers calling on workers to report to work during the disaster, and violations of workers' rights.² As the Clean Clothes Campaign, we called on global brands to ensure the safety and rights of workers in their supply chains.³ The news feed in the aftermath of the earthquake⁴ suggested the need for a comprehensive data collection effort, leading to this research.

This research, conducted to understand the effects of the February 6, 2023, earthquake on textile and garment workers and labor relations in the sector, is based on surveys and qualitative interviews conducted in Gaziantep, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, and Adıyaman, from August to September 2023. The interviews were conducted by members of the United Textile Weaving Leather Workers

Union (BİRTEK-SEN) under the guidance of the Clean Clothes Campaign. The main research question is: "How did textile and garment companies producing for global brands, including global supply chains, manage their relationships with workers during and after the earthquake?" Subsidiary research questions explore whether the earthquake created an environment leading to rights violations in employer-worker relationships, how workers' material and spiritual well-being was affected, and how workers' experiences align with the textile and garment sector's widely touted ethical supply chain and sustainability goals. An earthquake is a disaster. During disasters, both brands and manufacturers in the supply chain have claimed to be supportive of workers, asserting that they have demonstrate flexibility during these challenging times.⁵ This research provides an opportunity to inquire about the nature of the support workers truly received and what they really went through.

The Kandilli Observatory announced the magnitude of the February 6, 2023, earthquake as 7.7. The earthquake affected Türkiye and Syria, and this being a densely populated and industrially significant region increased

¹ Web, Bella, "In the aftermath of earthquakes, Türkiye's textile industry calls on brands for support," *Vogue Business*, May 1, 2023

² Baylav, Mesut, "Depremın vurduğu Antep'te patronlar pazartesi işe çağırıyor," *Evrensel*, February 12, 2023

³ Temiz Giysi Kampanyası, 2023, "Giyim markaları, Türkiye'deki işçilerin ücretlerinin ödendiğinden ve güvenliklerinin sağlandığından emin olmalıdır!"

⁴ Aktaş, Eda, "Malatya'da deprem sırasında Chantuque Tekstil işçilerinin dışarı çıkması engellendi!" *Evrensel*, March 1, 2023

⁵ H&M Group, in its statement, mentioned that it would contribute \$100,000 to the Türkiye Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), \$250,000 to the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), and \$250,000 to Save the Children. Fast fashion giant Inditex committed 3 million euros to the Turkish Red Crescent and pledged 500,000 outerwear items to be distributed by the Turkish Red Crescent and AFAD.

⁶ Kandilli Observatory and Earthquake Research Institute, 2023, *Preliminary Assessment Report*

the level of damage.⁶ However, the scale of the aid earthquake victims received did not always match the magnitude of the disaster.

This research investigated the responses of both global brands and manufacturers in their supply chains immediately after the earthquake, as well as throughout the aftermath of this critical earthquake. It provides concrete findings on worker rights violations in global supply chains during disaster times, along with tangible policy recommendations.

The Turkish public debate in the wake of the earthquake focused primarily on the role of the state in coordinating and providing assistance during the disaster period. However, we believe it is essential to also discuss the relationship

established by employers with workers during this period, based on data. This is not only relevant to workers and employers, but also concerns the state – which regulates labor relations through laws – and consumers, who buy textile and garment products produced in these factories. Moreover, it involves brands that establish, manage, and claim to audit their supply chains according to ethical principles. Indeed, the responsibilities of brands in these relationships are explicitly stated in the OECD's (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains in the Garment and Footwear Sector, adopted in 2017. The disaster period disrupted routine operations, and this breaking point revealed the extent to which brands adhere to these rules.



“

Subsidiary research questions explore whether the earthquake created an environment leading to rights violations in employer-worker relationships.

Method, Scope, Sample

To be sensitive to the challenging experiences they had, this was an effort to protect them from retelling their trauma in a way that can harm them again

The earthquake-affected region is a part of Türkiye that is known for its intensive textile and garment production. Unlike the small-scale garment workshops in Istanbul that the Clean Clothes Campaign has reported about in the past, there are large-scale producers and factories in this region. Registering the workers to the state social security system is a common practice. However, employing Syrian workers under temporary protection, without registration, is another practice mentioned in the interviews, albeit to a limited extent. The production sites in this region are intertwined with global supply chains, and they supply globally renowned brand groups such as Inditex (the parent company of Zara). Therefore, this research yielded meaningful data to see how global brands and the factories producing for them adapted to the earthquake, and the impact of their responses throughout region. When selecting

four provinces for this research among the 11 affected by the earthquake, we sought to include factories in these provinces that are connected to global supply chains. We reached out to workers using a snowball method. In addition to garments, home textile products are commonly produced in these provinces. The presence of cotton production in the region facilitates access to raw materials. These provinces, and this general region of Türkiye, constitute a significant cross-section for textile production. This can be easily observed by simply keeping up with industry news. The fact that production could only recover to 70% months after the earthquake, affecting the entire textile sector in Türkiye, highlights the importance of understanding the behavior of global supply chains in the textile and garment sector during the earthquake⁸

Our research primarily examined post-earthquake impacts through the experiences of textile and garment workers, using both quantitative and qualitative data. A form containing both quantitative and qualitative questions was used in interviews with textile and garment workers in the four provinces. The goal was to map workers' experiences clearly with closed-ended questions to allow for comparability across our sample, while also posing qualitative questions to allow workers to convey their experiences in-depth. However, qualitative questions were formulated within a rather narrow framework, to be sensitive to the challenging experiences they had and to respect legal processes. This was an effort to protect them from retelling their trauma in a way that can harm them again.

Quantitative questions focused on areas such as how soon the respondents' workplace reopened after the earthquake, the number of days off workers'

took, their salaries, and their increased workloads. Qualitative questions, on the other hand, focused on areas such as workers' experiences during the earthquake, the typical working environment at the factory, how it changed after the earthquake, as well as overtime conditions.

The city distribution ensured an equal number of interviews from each province, maintaining balance within the region (Figure 1). The gender balance reflects the gender distribution among workers, resulting in a majority of male interviewees. A few interviews were conducted with non-Turkish citizens, Syrian workers. Only six workers were working informally, without insurance, and four of them were Syrian.

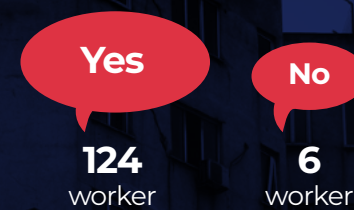
City Distribution

FIGURE 1. City distribution of the interviewed workers



Registered Workers

FIGURE 2. Workers registered with insurance in their workplaces



Gender Distribution

FIGURE 3. Interviewed workers gender distribution



Image: Akin Akdağ

General Conditions in the Textile and Garment Sector

Türkiye has ranked among the top 5–6 countries in garment and textile exports.

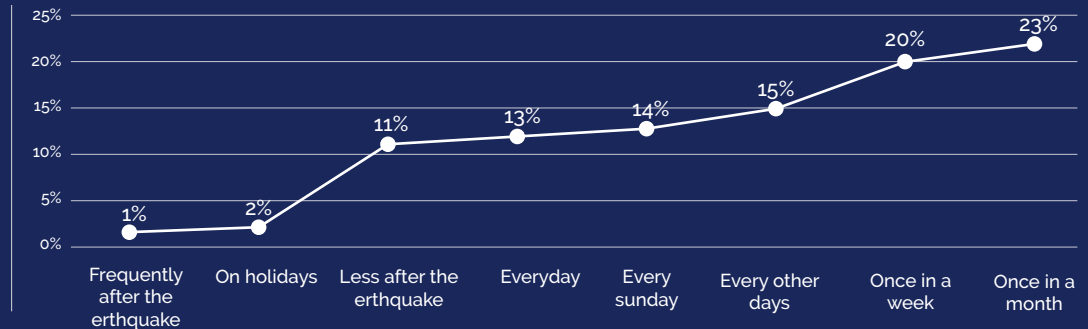
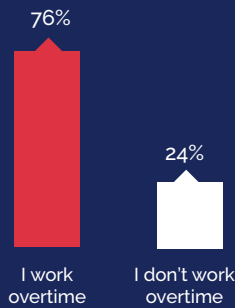
Türkiye holds a significant position in the global economy for textile exports, producing a meaningful share of textiles within global supply chains. In recent years, Türkiye has ranked among the top 5–6 countries in garment and textile exports.⁹ Production is carried out for major brands, and textile consumption is widespread. Textile export figures, which were \$9.4 billion in 2010, have increased over the years, reaching \$13.1 billion in 2014, \$12.3 billion in 2020, and \$16.2 billion in 2021.¹⁰ However, the impact of the pandemic, initially negative and later positively influenced by a partial shift away from Asia, is also clear. The main destinations for Turkish textile exports are generally European Union countries and the United States, which constitute the

headquarter countries of the global brands covered in this study. While 41.1% of the total exports go to EU member countries, the US ranked first among the "countries where Turkey exports the most" in 2021, with a share of 12.9%.¹¹ The overall market shares are consistent with Türkiye's export figures. Within the world's garment imports, the EU maintains its leadership with \$179.5 billion in imports and a 34% market share, while the US follows with \$96 billion in imports and an 18% market share.¹² Therefore, the working conditions of the garment and textile producers in the earthquake regions discussed in this report are of interest not only to Türkiye, but also to brands and consumers in EU countries and the US.



Overtime Distribution

FIGURE 4. Interviewed workers overtime distribution



⁹ Şimşek, Yağmur Melis, "Turkish textile exports stand still in 2022." *Textilegence*, January 25, 2023

¹⁰ Ministry of Commerce, *Textile and Raw Materials Sector Report*

¹¹ https://ticaret.gov.tr/data/5b87000813b8761450e18d7b/Tekstil_Yan_Sanayi.pdf

¹² Istanbul Ready-made Clothing and Apparel Exporters Association (IHKİB), "Dünya Hazırgiyim ve Tekstil Ticaretinde Yeni Trendler,"

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Serious gaps in health and safety, as well as workplace accidents, are prevalent. Exposure to harmful chemicals, working in environments with inadequate ventilation, the lack of safety measures as well as the lack of sufficient personal protective equipment are prominent issues affecting workers in textile and garment production.

Although informal labor and especially child labor are more common in workshops, Syrian refugees can also be employed informally in factories. Syrian refugees, who may lack legal work permits, are often exploited in the textile and garment sector. They may face worse working conditions and lower wages compared to Turkish workers. Despite these challenging conditions, workers may not have the right to form an independent union or join existing unions. This limits their ability to defend their working conditions and rights. As seen in our research, even when there is a union organizing, collective bargaining is almost nonexistent.

Another general feature revealed in the Clean Clothes Campaign's research in Türkiye is the prevalence of "mobbing." Mobbing, as observed in the textile and garment sector in Türkiye, is the systematic and routine verbal harassment of employees by employers. The most common expression of this, as mentioned in some responses in this research, is being "scolded." The rapid pace of ready-made garment production, especially in global supply chains, means supervisors and managers to often "hurry" or "scold" workers, many of whom lack legal work permits, for not producing fast enough and force them to work overtime. It is evident that the volume of these rights violations and the harsh tone used against workers fits the definition of "mobbing."

Despite these violations, we will examine how the structural nature of this sector, which is highly problematic in terms of workers' rights and well-being, adapted during the earthquake in the three sections below. We will address the direct impact of the earthquake, employers' reactions, and the working conditions that emerged in the weeks after the earthquake, taking into account the role of global brands.



Image:
Necmettin Karaca/AA

The Direct Impact of the February 2023 Earthquake on Workers

In this section, we will discuss the physical and mental damage caused by the earthquake and the attitudes of the state and employers toward workers as they struggled with this damage. We will also describe how workers returned to work and the conditions under which they worked in the subsequent sections.

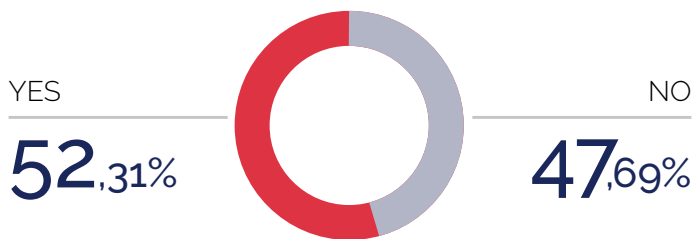
We will present the conditions under which workers returned to work after experiencing a disaster. Understanding the week of a worker who started working a week after the earthquake provides important context when evaluating their return to work. One of the advantages of conducting research in the field of civil society is that it can provide a broader understanding of the humanitarian, financial, legal, social, and psychological contexts of the groups we advocate for and the sector conditions we are trying to improve. In this section, our goal is not to assess the aftermath of the earthquake but to narrate the days of workers who returned to work, were dismissed, or faced threats of dismissal.

1. Housing and Basic Needs

The earthquake caused deaths in workers' families and close ones, leaving a significant psychological impact. However, as expressed by the workers, the most critical needs in the first hours and days following the earthquake were shelter and food. More than half of the participating workers' homes were damaged.

Damage to workers' housing

FIGURE 5. Was your house damaged in the earthquake?



Housing is a very real challenge. It is a concrete problem both in terms of being a basic human need and affecting workers' capacity to continue to work. It also brings health and safety issues. The damage to homes or the fear that the house may be (further) damaged is exacerbated by the inaccessibility of inspections. This is evident when analyzing the qualitative data: 104 out of 130 workers conveyed housing and related difficulties after the earthquake.

In the beginning, workers who couldn't stay in their damaged homes tried to set up tents. Obtaining tents and food was their priority. It is clear from the workers' responses that the help they expected did not come during this period.

"We had difficult days. We were hungry and thirsty. We were homeless. The factory did not support us. The state did not support us at all."

"We couldn't enter our houses. We waited in the cold and snow for a week. We struggled a lot. We slept in the car."

"They even cut the aid that was supposed to help."

"If djemevi and NGOs didn't help, we would die of hunger and cold."

The last quote is from a Syrian worker. Regarding assistance, the stories of Syrian workers differ from those of Turkish citizen workers. One Syrian worker retells those days immediately after the earthquake as follows:

"I heard the following words many times from locals during the earthquake process: 'These are Syrians, don't help them.'"

During a period when every kind of crisis was experienced, the fact that the little aid that came through was distributed in this discriminatory fashion created both financial difficulties and damaged their dignity.

Workers who couldn't stay in their homes also faced the challenge of needing arrange accommodation in such a way that allowed them to return to work when called back after the earthquake.

"We had to leave our homes. We went to another city. We were forced to work"

after the earthquake. I placed my family in a safe place and returned to Malatya. I stayed on the company grounds for 1 month. I had no social activity, and there was no place where I could take a comfortable shower and sleep.”

In terms of housing issues, the “village” emerged as a common theme in the interviews. Though not immune to damage, villages are considered much safer than the city, so many workers with relatives in villages took refuge with them post-earthquake. However, staying in villages posed challenges for workers in terms of transportation to the factories, especially for workers without a personal vehicle.

We systematically recorded the impressions of those conducting the survey as data. One of the findings from the analysis of this impression data is that the housing issue continues to directly affect workers' daily working conditions after the earthquake:

“The worker lives in the village. Because of the transportation problem, he has to stay with a different relative every week. Therefore, this process exhausts the worker both physically and psychologically.”

In some cases, villages may seem like a shelter for workers to meet their housing needs. After the earthquake, the financial situation of workers who lost their homes in the disaster was compounded by increases in rent and the cost of the living, making it extremely difficult for many workers to make ends meet. Forced to leave their homes, the majority who remained in the city for an extended

period initially stayed in tents, and if lucky, they moved into containers.

Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that when employers rapidly called workers back to factories, most workers were still staying in tents or in distant villages.

“I couldn't find a rental house after the earthquake.”

This quote illustrates that the housing problem is not only a standalone issue but also a real obstacle to going to work. Rental house prices have significantly increased due to a decrease in housing supply. This has been acknowledged by real estate experts.¹³ and even by the Minister of the Interior, who stated a few weeks after the earthquake: “Exorbitant rent increases are as painful a reality as the earthquake in recent times.”¹⁴ The current situation of workers regarding housing is shown below. Among the 68 people (more than half our sample) of workers who reported damage to their homes in the earthquake, only a very small portion (22.1%) managed to rent a new and undamaged house. None of the respondents received housing assistance from their workplace. People staying in tents often had to share with many others: “Staying in the same tent with 30 people affected me and my family very badly; we had no privacy left.” Some workers could not initially find a tent. Among workers who were called back to work within one or two weeks, some did not find a solution to their housing problem:

“We slept in open areas with my family.”

“We stayed on the streets for days, struggling to access tents and basic necessities.”

13 Emsal.com, “Deprem Bölgelerinde Kiralar İkiye Katlandı,” April 25, 2023

14 Turkish Ministry of Internal Affairs, “Bakanımız Sn. Soylu: Deprem Bölgesinde Fahiş Kira Artışları Konusunda Devlet Olarak Gereğini Yerine Getiriyoruz,” February 25, 2023

Accommodation

FIGURE 5. If your houses suffered from damage, where do you live?



An alternative housing solution reported by workers was living in a car: "We stayed in the car. There was no electricity for days, no water, and the weather was very cold." Workers faced this housing problem on top of the violation of their compensation and other rights, when they had to leave the province where their workplace is located and not being able to return when the factory called essentially forced them to quit their jobs.

Only one worker was identified who received housing support from the workplace. "We set up a tent in front of the house for two days. Then we stayed in the factory. They provided accommodation for families. Some are still staying in the containers the factory provided. Whoever wants stays." This example illustrates how the employer-worker relationship can progress in different ways after a disaster. Textile and garment factories could have turned into post-disaster solidarity spaces with the financial support of global brands. However, this option was not prioritized by either global actors or local suppliers.

2. Financial Difficulties

While housing and food insecurity were prominent in the early days following the earthquake, another issue rapidly entering the agenda of workers who could not go to work was the financial hardship they faced during the disaster period. These financial difficulties ranged widely, from transportation expenses for workers coming from villages, to diaper expenses for workers with babies. These financial difficulties meant that workers, who were rapidly called back to work after the earthquake, had to go back to work before addressing their housing and psychological needs, because they risked the possibility of losing their jobs and had no other resources to rely on.

According to the research conducted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Derya Göçer and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Onur Bahçecik, titled "The Effect of Brand-Supplier Relationships in the Earthquake Zone on Producers," published by Middle East Technical University (METU), global brands did not significantly postpone the workload of employers by changing the deadlines in the post-earthquake period. When combined with the general conditions of the textile and garment sector in Türkiye, this situation led employers to call workers back to the factory almost forcibly and much earlier than required by public conscience or workers' rights during the post-earthquake period. Financial difficulties made it very difficult for workers to resist this call. The details of workers' experiences returning to work will be discussed again below. However, it is important to note here how post-disaster process management intersects with production sites. Many workers express that the financial difficulties they faced were the kind that cornered them. For example, a worker who was afraid for aftershocks says, "I had to take my children out of the city, but I reluctantly returned for bread money."

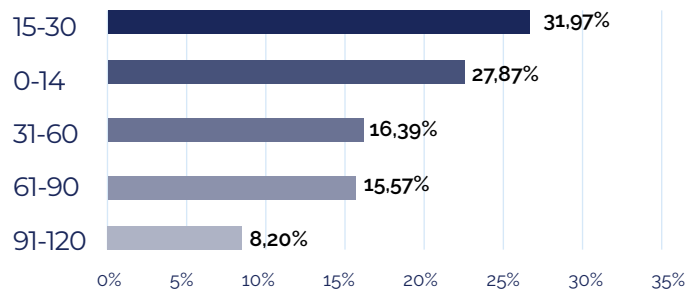
Despite this fear, which led them to send children away from the city for their safety, workers returned to work

because they didn't have any other means, savings, or significant assistance to use during this disaster time.

When combined with housing difficulties, workers whose access to their jobs was compromised also experienced psychological difficulties, as will be explained in detail below. In such a situation, it is understandable that they would want to take leave. The figure below shows that workers generally took very few days of leave after this disaster.

Days of Leave

FIGURE 6: Görüşülen işçilerin afet sonrası izin günü dağılımı



More than 50% of workers took two or four weeks of leave. Only a quarter of workers could take leave for more than two months. The wages they received during these leave periods explain a significant part of their financial difficulties. Only 24.6% of workers stated that they received their full wages while on leave. The majority (34.62%) did not receive any wages at all. Some received half of their usual wages. As mentioned in the first section, in an industry shaped by chronically low wages, workers facing a housing crisis following the disaster, who already had no savings, faced increased needs after the earthquake. The region-specific inflation caused prices and rents to rise as well. In such a period, even legally entitled annual leaves became intertwined with the financial difficulties of the workers. In short:

"I lost my savings; I am struggling."

Were you paid on leave?

FIGURE 6: After earthquake, the distribution of payment on leave



3. Psychological Challenges

The earthquake was one of the largest disasters in Türkiye's history. In addition to the detailed financial difficulties described above, the psychological well-being of workers and their families was also significantly affected. In this research with 130 workers, psychological trauma was expressed in various ways. Due to research ethics, questions were not designed to delve into the depths of psychological trauma, considering that interviewees could be affected again when narrating their stories. We believed that protecting them from these effects was more important than obtaining information. In the interviews where we investigated workers' post-earthquake work lives and possible impacts of global brands on this matter, we did not take the risk of adding such psychological distress. Nevertheless, details of the psychological effects they experienced came up during the interviews in response to general qualitative questions about the post-earthquake period. For example, a worker struggling with post-earthquake difficulties said:

"The images of screaming and crying people and bodies don't leave my mind."

Workers who were rapidly called back to factories and were not paid their salaries during leave were also individuals who experienced the loss of family members, acquaintances, and friends. The intersection map below illustrates how working conditions intersect with psychological difficulties.



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND THE CONDITIONS PROVIDED BY THE EMPLOYER

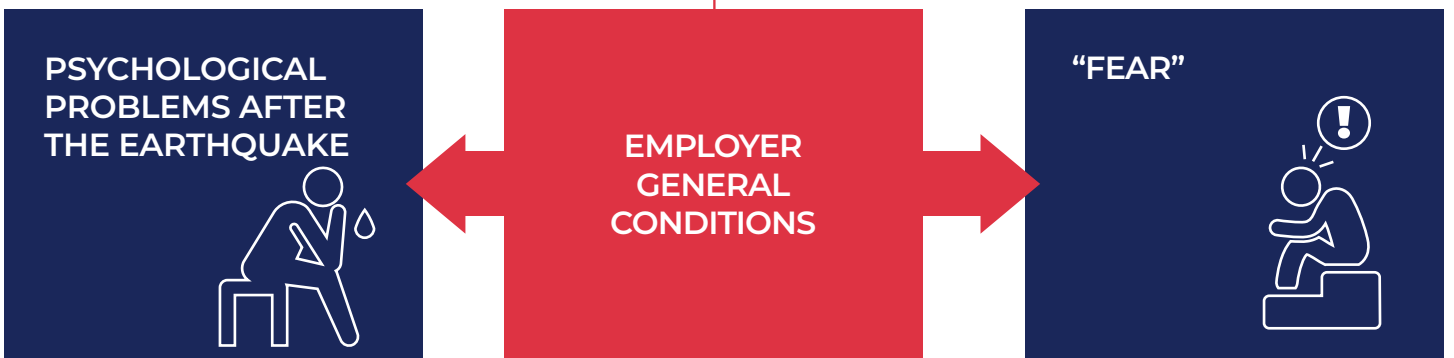




Image: Rena Effendi for The Wall Street Journal

Fear was one of the most frequently encountered words along with the term “**challenge**” in all qualitative responses. The grief of the losses, along with anger, created a real fear for workers' surviving family members, their children, and for themselves after the earthquake. As seen on the map, those expressing fear have also indicated having psychological difficulties, reflecting both the psychological challenges and the challenges faced after the earthquake. The psychological and financial difficulties intersect entirely with the conditions imposed by the employer, as seen on the upper axis of the map. Of course, some of these conditions existed before the earthquake. However, the most prominent among these conditions is “being rapidly called back to work after the earthquake.” Indeed, this could have been a condition that the textile and garment sector could have negotiated with other stakeholders in the global supply chain. However, 37 out of 130 workers couldn't even leave the factory where they worked

during aftershocks. These workers, who didn't even have the opportunity to grieve and recover from their fears from the first earthquake, acquired new fears with the aftershocks. “We left the city, became homeless. I was very scared, still scared, couldn't overcome it, haven't recovered.” It is important to keep in mind that the psychological state of the workers, which we will further describe below in the section on post-earthquake working conditions, is dire and the feeling of fear is real and widespread. Additionally, some workers assisted in search and rescue operations, while others had to tend their own relatives. The pressure to swiftly come to work exerted by factories, combined with the lack of paid leave, caused serious financial distress among the workers. This distress is then combined with the psychological and social needs of the workers in midst of a disaster. Workers had to balance their need to process what happened and the need to help the communities however they could.

06

The Attitude of Employers During the Earthquake Process

In this section, we will discuss the conditions in the workplace in the days immediately following the earthquake and the attitudes of employers. We will share quantitative and qualitative results regarding issues immediately following the earthquake, such as workplace damage, aftershocks, conditions for recalling and working, housing crisis, relocation leading to workers being unable to come to work, termination of employment, and the inability to receive compensation.

1. Workplaces and Damages

Physical security and safety are the primary concerns when returning to work in a disaster zone. Only 54 out of 130 workers (41%) state that their workplace did not suffer any damage. Forty-five individuals observed medium to heavy damage (34%). One-fourth of the workers reported light damage. It is noteworthy that less than half of the workers (45%) claim that inspections were carried out by authorized institutions, despite the high rate of damage they reported. More importantly, the qualitative observations we list below indicate that workers observed instances where severe or moderate damages were reported as light or undamaged. Some of the observed damage remained unrepaired despite inspections. Here, we observe that workers' safety was made subordinate to the wish to swiftly resume production, despite the damage after the earthquake.

FIGURE 7: Observations of Damages at the Factories

"It [the factory] suffered severe damage, renovation was done, and they represented it as light damage."

"Despite being damaged, an undamaged report was given."

"It suffered damage. Strengthening was done. It was passed as undamaged during the inspection."

"It suffered damage, but there was no inspection."

"It suffered severe damage, but they played it down. There was an inspection, and renovation was done."

"The workplace was severely damaged. Later, they represented it as light damage. The machines inside were destroyed."



2. Recruitment, Termination

Supply chain management has not adapted post-earthquake working conditions and timelines for resuming production to the financial and psychological difficulties the workers experienced. One of the clearest indicators of this is recruitment periods and working hours. Many workers had to change cities, go to villages, and stay in tents and container cities far away from their workplace. However, there has been no flexibility in the textile and garment sector to accommodate this. The length of most workers' leave periods after the earthquake is surprisingly short. As seen in Figure 10, the majority of workers returned to work within one month or less, while 39% of workers returned to work within two weeks or less.

Start times for returning to work after the earthquake

FIGURE 7. How many days after the earthquake did you start working?



Syrian refugee workers interviewed did not take any leave and returned to work quickly. The fact that migrant workers express the most disadvantaged positions in this research is indicative of the precarious conditions of migrant workers in the textile and garment

sector. For example, one migrant worker who returned to work with his children after the earthquake said: "I don't speak up to the masters who shout at my two children because they work with me." Another migrant worker summarized their working conditions as follows

"Everyone sees us differently because we are Syrian. Our rights are being neglected wherever we work."

Workers who quickly returned to work after the earthquake did so while their focus was still on the earthquake conditions:

"My mind is with my family because aftershocks continue."

While some of the working conditions speak to the psychological difficulties, another part is an effort to survive financially, as there is a relationship between earthquake aid and work.

"I had to take my children out of the city, but I reluctantly returned for bread money."

A worker who was afraid for aftershocks

“ My supervisors called me, and they said if I don't come, they won't deposit the earthquake aid.

This shared experience among workers shows a different side of the earthquake aid system, different from the predominant narrative in the news or disclosed in company reports. Aid can be used as a manipulation tool for the post-disaster needs of the industry. According to another worker, access to this aid was a dire necessity, given the challenging housing and living conditions described above, leading some workers to return to work even if accessing aid meant jeopardizing their personal safety:

“ After the earthquake, I faced financial difficulties and went to work at the risk of compromising my safety.

As seen, while most damaged workplaces have not been inspected or their damages have been downplayed, going to work creates a new security gap after the earthquake. However, aid to workers who did not receive their full salary while on leave was also conditional upon their return to work. Some workers, who could not return as quickly due to the damage of their homes and loss of loved ones, were laid off. In this situation, the cost of not being able to return to work for such a short period includes both the loss of disaster aid and the loss of one's job. If aid serves as a carrot, being fired is used as a stick.

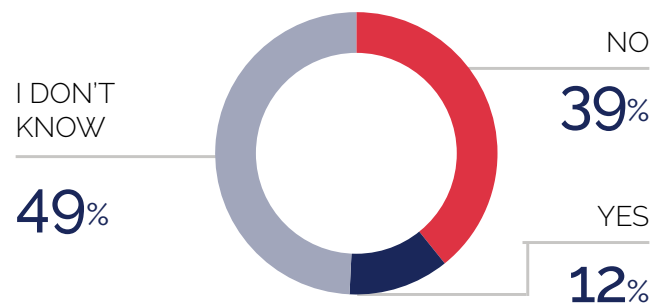
“ I was forced to return to work because the factory threatened to terminate my employment contract.

In these work environments, where the majority of workers are registered but 89% do not have a collective agreement, when workers are asked why they returned to work on the date that they did, the overwhelming majority said it was because “the boss called at that time.” Despite the fact that

returning to work jeopardized workers' personal safety and mental well-being, workers still felt compelled to go, given the risk of being fired. It is not possible to know the exact amount of severance pay owed to workers through this research. However, the table below summarizes the information workers have about whether their colleagues who were fired received any severance pay. Only 12% of workers confidently state that workers who were fired received severance pay.

What workers know about severance pay?

FIGURE 9. Severance Pay Knowledge



A story of worker who was fired

“We were called a week after the earthquake. They said they would arrange a place for us to stay. Many went to another city. They initially accepted our families, but later, they asked us to come without our families. We started working with 20 or 30 people. No one stayed in the company properly. They said there was no place to stay.

The number of workers was low, and one person was doing multiple jobs. Overtime was enforced. Despite being an expert chief in my field, my work area was constantly changed. I was not allowed to go to my own department. I was subjected to threats by the managers. They asked me to resign after our argument. I didn't, and one week later, I was given my termination.”

Another pattern of dismissal observed relates to the experience of workers who changed cities due to housing difficulties and the fear of aftershocks after the earthquake. One worker said:

“I said I am leaving because of the earthquake. I told them I demanded my rights. They said the earthquake is not a valid reason, and they won’t pay compensation.”

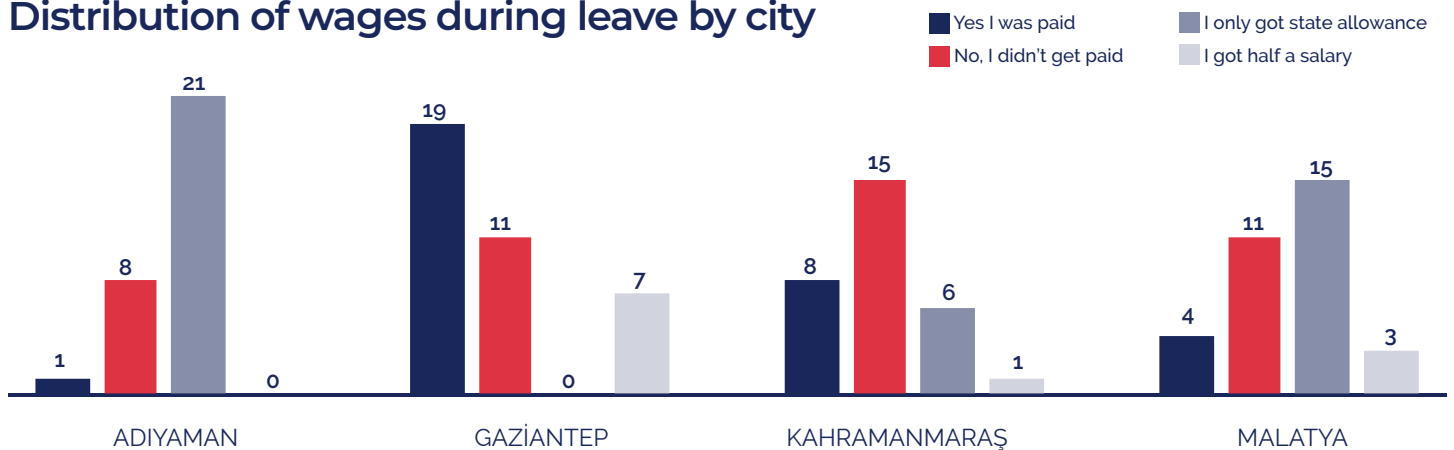
The failure to provide compensation to workers who cannot return quickly due to damaged homes and losses should concern the global brands that source from these damaged workplaces and their consumers. Dismissals took place after the lifting of the ban on layoffs, and during this period, workers who could not go to work received state support of 133 TL per day for 3 months.¹⁶ **Some workers took their**

dismissal cases to court to claim their compensation, but most these court cases remain unresolved.

As seen in the Disaster Law Guide prepared by the Union of Bar Associations, workers have many rights during annual leave, including receiving a salary and severance pay¹⁷ Also, if workers cannot come to work due to the earthquake for more than a week, their employment contracts can be terminated, but the right to severance pay may still be valid.¹⁸ Therefore, after an earthquake, calling workers back to work – and threatening to dismiss them without compensation if they are unable to return – violates both social conscience and labor law.

We also observed violations of the law related to permissions and wages. Workers have a right to a minimum wage in disaster conditions, a wage determined by the state. There were, however, workers who received no wages at all. The distribution of wages during workers' leave, by city, can be seen in the figure below.

Distribution of wages during leave by city



As seen in Figure 12, there are differences among workers in earthquake-affected cities in terms of whether they received full wages. While there were fewer workers who received wages during leave in Adiyaman and Malatya, the majority workers in Gaziantep received full wages. In Kahramanmaraş, the majority did not receive any wages. The minimal damage in Gaziantep's factories led to a quicker return to work for the workers, hence the receipt of wages. In other cities, workers who couldn't go back to work received the daily support of 133 TL provided by the government, to compensate for the material and emotional damage caused by the earthquake. Government support was not sufficient given the financial conditions described above.

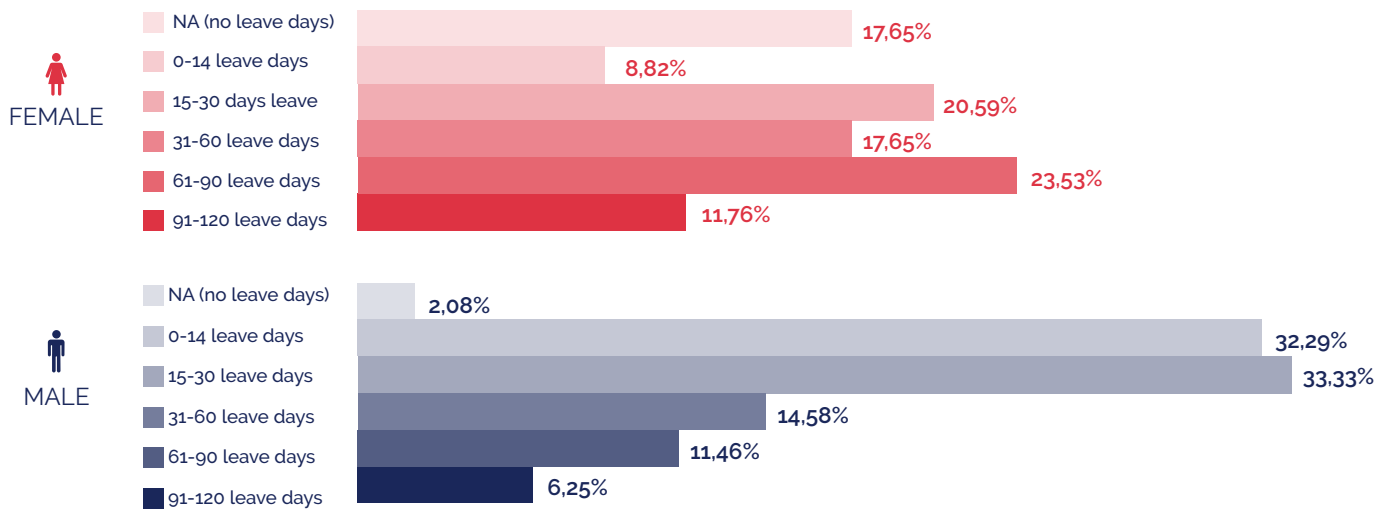
¹⁶ Using foreign exchange rates from that period, this amounts to roughly 6.50 euros or 7 USD per day.

¹⁷ Union of Bar Associations, 2023, Disaster Law Guide

¹⁸ Turkish Labor Act of 2033, Law No. 4857 - <https://alitumbas.av.tr/depremde-evi-yikilan-kisi-bu-sebeple-isten-ayrilip-tazminata-hak-kazanabilir-mi/>

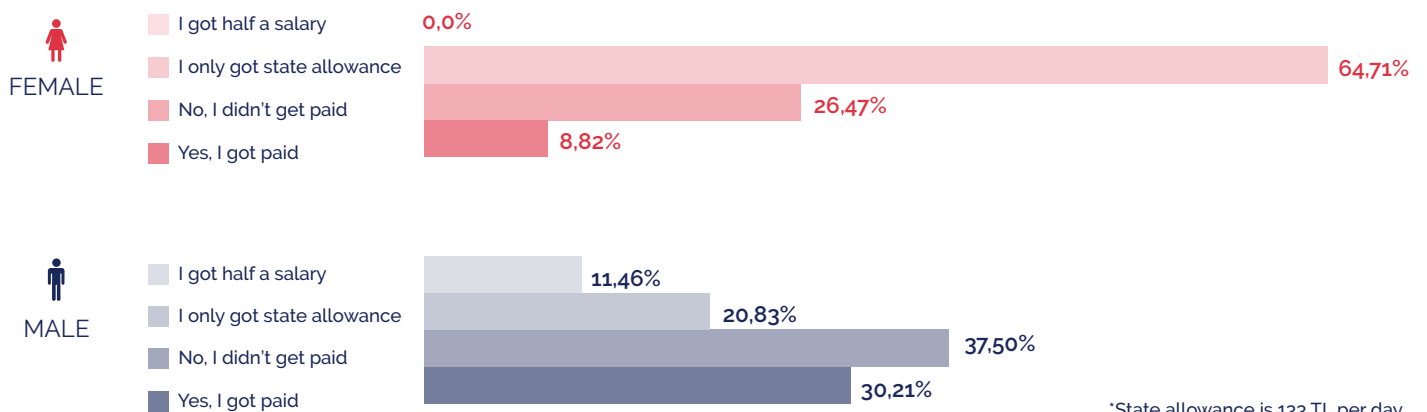
When we examine the number of days off taken from a gender perspective, we can see that men returned to work in factories faster than women. While only 32% of women returned within the first 30 days, 65% of men returned to work within the same period.

Gender difference in the leave days after earthquake



When it comes to receiving wages during leave, there is also a gender inequality. While the majority of women only received government support, with only 8.82% receiving wages, 30% of men have received wages, and only one-fifth have received government support.

Distribution of wages during leave by gender



*State allowance is 133 TL per day

3. Not Getting Help from the Workplace

The worker, upon being called to work early, returns without really having financially and mentally recovered. He comes due to the risk of dismissal and the fear of not being able to make ends meet, tries to rebuild their damaged home or life in the affected city. Amidst the significant waves of aid seen on screens and social media after the earthquake, they have often not received help from their employer. As conveyed by one interviewee: **“The pride of the worker was shattered when the employer who provided so much help to AFAD and the Red Crescent but did not make any additional payments to them, to the workers.”** Among the 130 workers, 28 directly addressed the issue of not receiving any help from the workplace. In some cases, **“They have even cut the help that was supposed to be given.”** In the observation of a worker: **“I heard that the factory pays salaries to those who come back to work early but no help is given to those who do not come back quickly.”** In these cases, aid is structured as a carrot for going to work, as mentioned above.

Here, the priority is once again the fast-paced production rather than workers' safety and wellbeing. The textile and garment sector is often criticized for beating to the drum of rotating shop displays several times in a season. In this post-disaster situation, we can see the concrete impact of that pace on the worker. Even a mechanism like **“help”** is used as a tool to maintain production speed when necessary. Sometimes, the so-called help didn't even come from the employer: **“The aid given to the earthquake zone [referring to aid from the state and NGOs] was not given to us. When given, they made it look like what they gave was their own aid.”** In the policy recommendations listed later in this report, we emphasize the need for developing rules for supply chains regarding the distribution of humanitarian aid during disasters.

“They have even cut the help that was supposed to be given.”

“



Workers' Working Conditions After the Earthquake

07

In this section, we examine the conditions faced by workers who returned to work, both financially and morally, and what their working life offers and does not offer them. Finally, we will share how they describe their general lives, months after the earthquake. By describing the overall situation in the sector before the earthquake, immediately after the earthquake, and current conditions, we aim to comprehensively present how workers in the textile and garment sector were affected by the earthquake. This is because workers' well-being is a whole, with interacting parts including legal rights, general working conditions, and general living conditions.

As we can easily see from qualitative and quantitative data, workers returned to labor in lightly, moderately, and heavily damaged factories, with increased working hours, and the fear of dismissal. In some cases, there was no standard working environment due to heavy damage.

As one worker put it:

"We had nowhere to stay; I lived in the factory for days in unhygienic conditions."

Workers were asked to perform tasks that do not fall under their job descriptions. Many of these tasks were related to the earthquake, such as cooking and dealing with heavy machinery. One worker said:

"Also, most of the machines in the workplace collapsed during the earthquake. They called on workers to lift the machines. Some workers left their jobs because of this."

Regarding routine tasks, we observed two separate results. In some factories, the workload decreased due to heavy damage, like machines breaking and parts of the factory becoming unusable. However, in most factories, despite the damage, the workload has increased for the remaining workers as they continue their work without any delivery deadlines being much postponed in a meaningful way.¹⁹ A concrete result of this is an increase in the incidence overtime. Already shaken by the earthquake, they found themselves compelled to use the time they could have spent with their families to feel safe, at the workplace, further adding to the upheaval in their lives. In some cases, the consequence of not working overtime is termination. One worker said:

When I don't work overtime, they threaten to fire me and my friends."

The situation has turned into such a major crisis that even the burden of using legal leave rights has fallen on the shoulders of some workers. In this example, the worker must pay money in order to take Sundays off:

"I don't want to work on Sundays. I have to get permission even for Sundays, and they say I have to find someone to work for me to get permission. Another worker asked me for a daily wage of 900 liras to work for me, my daily wage is 500 liras,

so I pay an extra 400 liras not to work for a day."

When overtime is required, especially in workplaces that operate on a three-shift basis – dividing the day into three, including 8-hour periods, even at night – many workers must navigate the relationship between working hours and private life. Quoting from an interviewee's impression report from the survey:

There is no service. They say you don't want to stay for overtime, but you have to."

In fact, some workers expressed the concept of overtime not as "overtime" but as "mandatory overtime" during interviews. Some of the workers forced into overtime are doing so not out of fear of being laid off but rather out of fear of not making ends meet with their current salaries. Among the 130 workers, only 31 individuals (23.5%) stated that they do not work overtime at all. The most precise definition of overtime in current conditions is reflected in the following quote:

"If the work doesn't get done, then overtime every day."

The chart below presents the frequency of overtime work among workers.



In addition to an increased workload and overtime, another aspect of workers' current conditions is the mobbing they face in the workplace. In the Clean Clothes Campaign research titled "Left Behind by Textiles (Tekstilin Geride Bıraktıkları),"²⁰ which focuses on undocumented workers, we observed that employers in small workshops in Istanbul use verbal abuse tools such as "scolding and shouting" on workers they start employing at a young age, even as children.

Although the workplaces in the earthquake zone that are the subject of this research are larger and factory-scale, and even though most workers are registered, workers still conveyed by the workers having experienced mobbing. Experiences described by expressions such as "scolding," "insults," and "no respect" can directly constitute "mobbing." Although there was no direct question about mobbing, 10% of the respondents referred to the problem of mobbing or experienced mobbing themselves. In the words of one worker:

"We are exposed to a lot of mobbing in the factory; some speak up, and some are forced to remain silent out of fear of losing their jobs."

Despite the international agreements and the ethical behavior rules declared by brands mentioned in the introduction, conditions worsened in recent years and again since the earthquake. One worker said: "Ten years ago, working conditions were good, but now they are not. We couldn't get any help. Before the earthquake, we couldn't get our rights, and now we can't get them at all." In these challenging conditions, workers are still unable to make ends meet. Working overtime, sacrificing having a life outside of work, and any existing savings are not sufficient. Only 12 out of 130 workers (9%) expressed that they live a normal life and manage to get by, while the research reveals that 91% of the participating workers in the sector struggled with financial conditions after the earthquake, experienced life difficulties, struggled to meet their basic needs, and lacked tools like collective agreements.



Image: sendika.org

Do I even have a life?

When asked to describe their living conditions, workers directly depicted a life they find challenging, difficult, and they sometimes even struggle to call it a life. Even though most workers except for the Syrian refugees were registered, their salaries were still not enough to get by. Some mentioned being able to get by only because they are single, while others expressed not being able to marry due to financial difficulties. Some young people stated they could not afford to leave their homes and start their own families. Retirees feel the need to continue working, and they can't even afford a vacation or picnic. The most common response to our question about their living conditions was: "What life do I have?" This is not surprising. One mother's experience is as follows:

"I am a mother of two children. I rent my house, and I earn the minimum wage. I work in shifts. My life revolves between work and home. I can't even find time to rest."

When overtime and a heavy workload are combined, there is no "life" left. Senior and skilled workers do not seem to be an exception to this situation. One worker gave this example:

"I am a factory worker. I receive a slightly higher wage than the minimum wage because I am a skilled worker. The wage I receive is less than half of the poverty line."

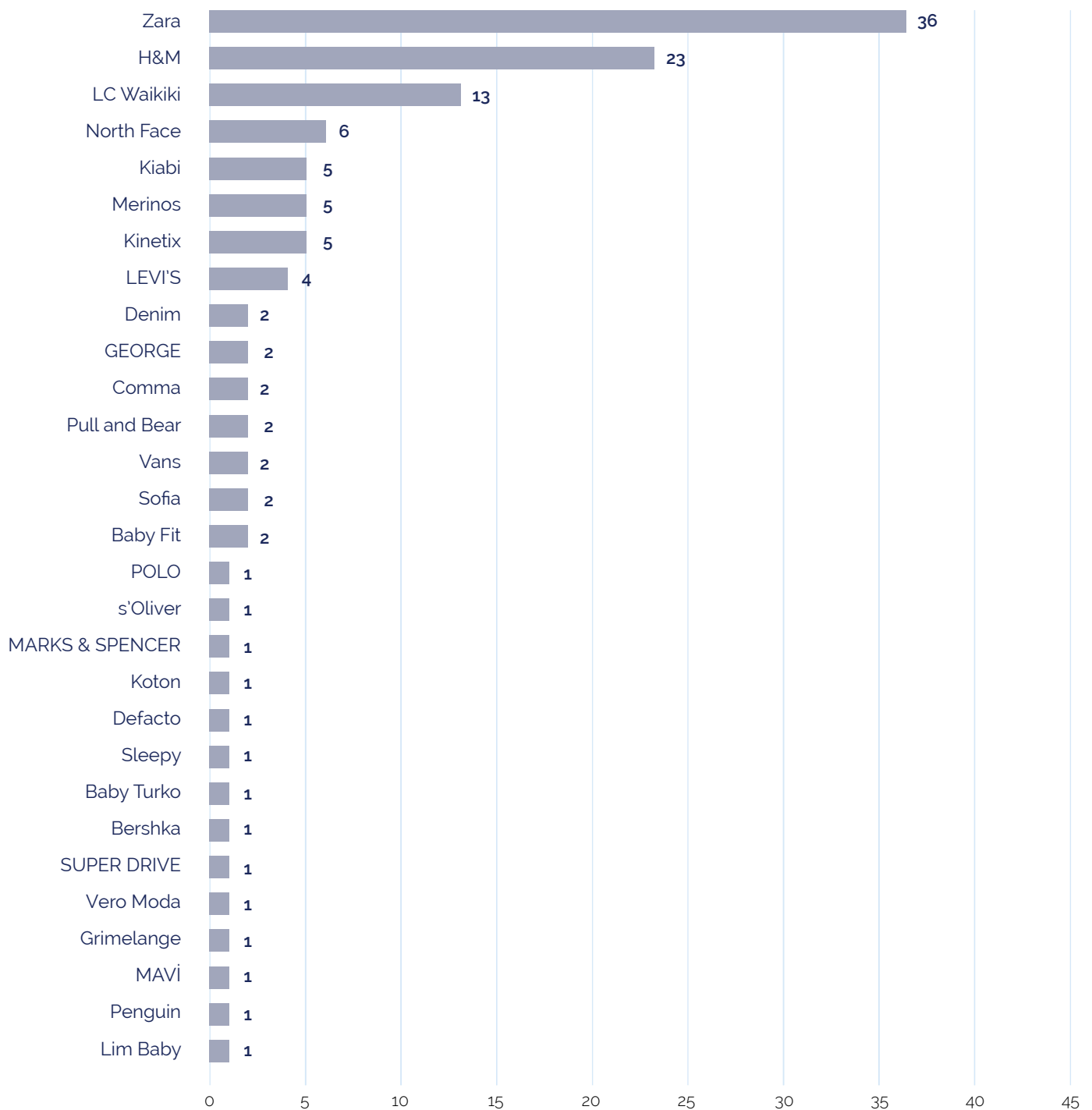
This example demonstrates that the living conditions of workers in the earthquake-affected region could not be solely explained by the country's economic crisis. The situation could be different with different salary allocations for various job categories. The textile and garment sector, which continues to employ skilled workers for inadequate wages, even after the earthquake, attempts to develop by cutting labor costs as much as possible.



Brands and Policy Recommendations

08

Brands mentioned by workers



Policy Recommendations

1 Physical Safety

The right to a safe workplace after a disaster should be considered as one of the most basic rights of textile and garment workers. The physical safety of the workplace and conditions like hygiene must be inspected and a factory must be declared safe to work by trained engineers in for production to continue. To ensure the effectiveness of inspections, workplaces should not be able to downplay or withhold information about severe damages.

2 Difficult Times

It is important that supply chains do not suddenly break in difficult times. However, it is equally unacceptable for workloads to remain the same without changing delivery dates as if nothing happened. In the face of crisis, brands should keep sourcing relations intact while taking responsibility for the workers making their product by measures such as advancing payments and providing flexibility on lead times.

3 Transparency

There is a need for oversight and transparency regarding termination conditions and severance pay. Although the government has issued regulations on termination in earthquake-affected areas, workers report cases of termination without severance pay and unjust termination of employment contracts.

4 Mobbing

Awareness campaigns about mobbing in garment workshops and factories should be carried out for both employers and workers. These awareness campaigns should clarify the definitions of mobbing, child labor, or informal work. This process should be carried out with the participation of worker representatives and advocacy NGOs and should include an enforcement mechanism for holding perpetrators of mobbing accountable.

5 Severance Guarantee Fund

One concrete proposal to address for brands to address issues that emerged in the wake of the earthquake is the severance guarantee fund as part of a legally binding and enforceable Pay Your Workers – Respect Labour Rights agreement between brands and unions, an idea created by global NGOs and unions advocating in the sector. To provide a real solution to the structural crisis in the sector and crises during emergencies/disasters, there must be an acknowledgment by brands, retailers, and manufacturers of their mutual responsibility to ensure the well-being of workers, producers, and brands.

- **Ensuring workers receive their full wages at time of crisis**
- **Providing severance and other legally owed compensation in case factories are forced to close**
- **Protecting fundamental workers' rights, including the freedom of organization and collective bargaining**

6 Earthquake Reality

The textile and garment sector should create and enforce new ethical standards to protect workers who cannot come to work due to their inability to access housing in the disaster zone. Earthquakes are a reality in Türkiye, but other disasters (such as floods, storms) are also prevalent in regions where textile and garment production is intensive and are likely to increase with climate change. Stakeholders in the textile and garment sector, NGOs, and worker representatives must come together to determine ethical standards that account for the relationship between workers' reasons for not being able to come to work and employers' termination conditions, ensuring that workers who are unable to continue to come to work do not lose their acquired rights to compensation out of a false understanding that workers who cannot turn up for work have "resigned".

7 Develop rules for humanitarian aid

Brands and relevant international organizations should **develop rules for humanitarian aid** distribution in disasters for global garment and textile and garment supply chains. The first two decades of the 21st century have witnessed the emergence of new humanitarian crises due to climate change, wars, and migrations. Natural disasters like floods, fires, earthquakes, and droughts are rapidly turning into politically mismanaged crises. Considering that garment and textile production is concentrated in areas particularly vulnerable for the effects of climate change, it is clear that the sector's ethical standards, or binding rules where possible, need to account for such disasters. As one worker expressed, **"I learned whose life is valuable and whose is worthless during the earthquake. The lives of workers like us are very worthless."** Concrete indicators of the value given to life during disaster periods should be worked on without waiting for disasters to occur. Humanitarian aid is never a substitute for companies taking direct responsibility for the workers who depend on them for their wages and just working conditions.

The report indicates challenges in these three areas. However, addressing these fundamental obligations requires a collaborative effort involving all stakeholders, especially brands. The Pay Your Workers agreement is proposed as a governance structure involving representatives from brands, employers, unions, and NGOs active in the supplier factories of signatory brands or factory groups. Unions and NGOs will inform workers about the demand process to ensure wage continuity and protect basic workers' rights during pandemics, disasters, and other crises.

The February 2023 earthquake is a clear proof that workers' well-being is not protected by existing global agreements and compromises. It is evident that there is a need for new agreements and solutions specific to crises, like an earthquake. The Pay Your Workers agreement stands as such an option. While workers face financial difficulties even when they are not laid off, the challenges of being without compensation and receiving irregular wages show that the problems of this sector cannot be solved by a single stakeholder. Moments like earthquakes require everyone to contribute.

Signatory brands will have to ensure employers do the following:

Pay regular wages on time or provide full back wages for past crises



Provide full severance pay during factory closures or mass layoffs (if the employer is unable to pay this will be paid out of the severance guarantee fund)



Respect workers' freedom of association and collaborate with the Inspectorate for compliance checks on workers' rights





Temiz Giysi Kampanyası

Adil ve sürdürülebilir bir tekstil sektörü için



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