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OUR LABOUR
OUR POWER

LABOUR AND RISK

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN TÜRKİYE

DUST - ASTHMA
ALLERGY

OCCUPATIONAL
DISEASES

MARCH 2025



**Temiz
Giysi
Kampanyası**

Adil ve sürdürülebilir bir tekstil sektörü için



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INTRODUCTION

As one of Türkiye's largest employment sectors, the textile industry also poses significant risks in term of occupational health and safety (OHS). The fact that OHS activities are found to be **insufficient** or partially sufficient in **75** per cent of the enterprises in the sector highlights the severity of this situation.¹

In small and medium-sized enterprises, problems such as lack of personal protective equipment, lack of machine safeguards, and low safety measures are among the main causes of occupational accidents. In addition, the high rate of unregistered employment in the sector makes it even more difficult to identify OHS-related risks.

Among the most prevalent occupational health hazards of the garment sector are diseases caused by dust exposure (such as byssinosis and silicosis), exposure to hazardous chemicals, non-ergonomic working conditions, and excessive noise. Furthermore, chemical abrasives like potassium permanganate and hypo, used as alternatives to sandblasting in denim bleaching, pose serious health risks to workers.

According to data from the *International Labour Organization* (ILO), approximately three million workers worldwide die each year due to occupational accidents and diseases, with occupational diseases accounting for the majority of these deaths.²

Although the legal framework for OHS in Türkiye started with the Labour Law No. 4857, which came into force in 2003, comprehensive regulations were only implemented with the enactment of the *Occupational Health and Safety Law* No. 6331 in 2012. Despite the existence of these legislation, implementation deficiencies and the failure of employers to fulfil their responsibilities continue to hinder efforts to eliminate hazards in the sector.

This report aims to assess the current situation of occupational health and safety in the the Turkish garment sector, identify key risks and hazards, and provide recommendations for addressing these challenges.

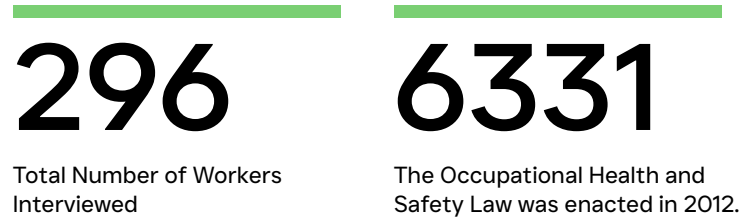
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

The findings of the research are based on a comprehensive field research conducted with 296 garment workers working in Istanbul's Bağcılar, Güneşli, Mahmutbey, and Güngören neighbourhoods, as well as in Malatya, Batman and Şanlıurfa.

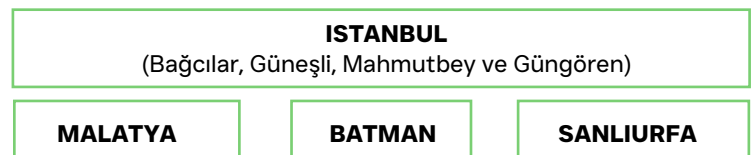
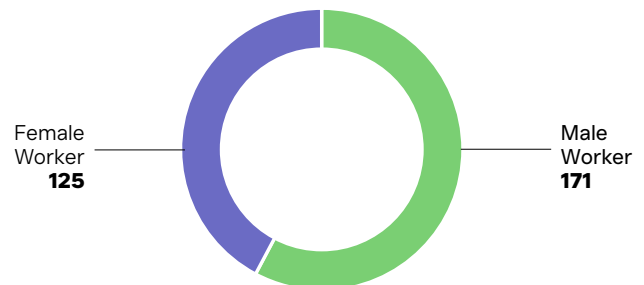
The research was conducted between June and October 2024, involving face-to-face interviews with 171 male and 125 female workers. The workers were informed about the purpose of the research, and they were assured that all data would remain anonymous in compliance with *Personal Data Protection Authority* (KVKK) regulations. Verbal consent was obtained from those who chose to participate voluntarily.

To gain a deeper understanding of the sector's current conditions and ensure independent access to workers, two different research methods were employed. Half of the interviews were conducted using the "snowball method", an effective approach for reaching labour networks.

Researchers visited areas where garment factories are located, engaging with workers randomly during lunch breaks or after work. The other half of the interviews were conducted by targeting *Tier 1* factories from supply chain lists disclosed by brands, ensuring a broader representation of workplace conditions.



FEMALE-MALE WORKER RATIO



¹ All the names of the workers mentioned in the quotes in this report have been changed for the protection of personal data security.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY



Photo: www.emekvegul.com

The garment sector presents a wide range of occupational health and safety (OHS) risks, leading to both workplace accidents and occupational diseases.

The garment sector presents a wide range of occupational health and safety (OHS) risks, leading to both workplace accidents and occupational diseases. These risks stem from various factors, including the processing of raw materials, production processes, machinery, equipment and the working conditions inherent to the sector. According to definition by the *International Labour Organisation (ILO)* and the *World Health Organisation (WHO)*, occupational health and safety encompass “a set of regulations aimed at maximising the physical, mental and social well-being of workers, preventing harm to their health and providing a safe working environment”.³ However, current conditions in the garment industry reveal significant deficiencies in the implementation of these standards. The main risks identified in the sector are:



NOISE EXPOSURE

High noise from roving machines, weaving looms, and other production equipment pose a serious threat to workers' hearing. Prolonged noise exposure can cause hearing loss, tinnitus, dizziness, and psychological problems.⁴ The maximum recommended noise exposure for workers should not exceed 87 decibels⁵ yet noise levels in weaving and spinning facilities frequently exceed 90 decibels, causing long-term auditory damage.



DUST EXPOSURE RISKS:

Natural fibres used in the textile industry – such as cotton, linen, wool, and silk – produce large amounts of dust during fibre processing. Inhalation of these particles can lead to byssinosis, also known as “cotton disease”, particularly in inadequate ventilated workshops.⁶ Additionally, exposure to silica dust used in denim sandblasting causes silicosis, a fatal lung disease. Dozens of denims sandblasting workers have died from silicosis. The severity of this issue led to the formation of the *Solidarity Committee of Sandblasting Workers* in 2008, which launched an intensive campaign to draw attention to the health risks faced by workers. As a result of this struggle, the Turkish Ministry of Health banned sandblasting in 2009. In 2010, silicosis was included under Public Health coverage and its treatment was made free of charge. In 2011, silicosis patients were granted pension rights through two articles added to the omnibus bill no. 6111.⁷

After the ban on denim sandblasting, bleaching processes started to be carried out with potassium permanganate, a dangerous chemical that continues to cause serious damage both to workers' health and the environment.⁸



HAZARDOUS CHEMICAL EXPOSURE:

Chemical substances such as dyes, formaldehyde, ammonia, phosphoric acid, heavy metals, carbonate, hydrogen peroxide and potassium permanganate used in garment production – especially in finishing and bleaching processes – seriously threaten the health of workers. These substances can enter the body through inhalation, skin contact, or through the eyes, leading to severe health issues, including allergic reactions, poisoning, skin diseases, lung cancer and other chronic illnesses.⁹



FIRE RISK:

The textile industry involves highly flammable material, which increases the risk of fires in fibre storages and pulp mills extensively. Inadequate fire safety measures can lead to devastating accidents that threaten the lives of workers.

One of the deadliest examples of such factory fires occurred at the Ali Enterprises factory in Pakistan on September 11, 2012. More than 250 workers lost their lives, and more than 55 workers were seriously injured. Many workers were trapped inside because the exit doors were locked.¹⁰ This incident highlighted globally critical failures of workers safety and factory inspections in the garment industry, as the *Ali Enterprises* fire was recorded as the deadliest factory fire in the garment industry.¹¹

A similar incident took place in Turkey in 2015, when two Syrian migrant workers died, and 5 workers were seriously injured in a fire in a garment workshop in Gaziantep. The lack of proper fire exits and neglect of fire safety standards the escape nearly impossible. Some workers were able to escape by jumping onto a tarpaulin held by firefighters.¹²



RISKS FROM MACHINERY EQUIPMENT AND MOVING PARTS:

Textile machinery with unguarded moving parts can cause severe injuries, including amputations, crush injuries, and fractures. In cases where safety precautions are inadequate, such accidents occur more frequently.¹³



ERGONOMIC RISKS ARISING FROM WORKING POSTURES

Garment workers often spend long hours standing, performing repetitive movements, and working in ergonomically bad positions. These conditions contribute to musculoskeletal disorders, including back, neck, back pain. Over time, excessive strain on the body can lead to symptoms such as burning pain, swelling, hypersensitivity to touch and reduced mobility. . Especially workers working in ironing, quality control, and packaging departments are more frequently exposed to such discomforts due to their standing work for extended periods.¹⁴



THERMAL COMFORT AND LIGHTING:

Failure to provide the necessary temperature and humidity conditions in some garment production areas may negatively affect workers’ health. In addition, inadequate lighting not only poses a risk of occupational accidents but also strains workers’ vision, leading to long-term eye problems.¹⁵



PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS:

Long working hours, excessive workload and low wages in the garment industry can cause psychological distress among workers, such as stress, anxiety, sleep disorders and depression. Women in the sector are particularly vulnerable to additional psychosocial risks, including mobbing (a form of workplace bullying), sexual harassment and discrimination.

In 2023, the Social Security Institution (SSI) in Türkiye recorded: 681,401 occupational accidents in Türkiye 945 cases of occupational diseases 1,966 workers lost their lives due to workplace accidents.¹⁶ According to the data published by ILO in January 2024, 2,459 out of every 100.000 workers in Türkiye suffer from occupational accidents or occupational diseases. 6.3 out of every 100,000 workers lose their lives due to work accidents. There are only 0.3 inspectors for every 10,000 workers. This situation clearly reveals the critical inadequacy of the inspection capacities.

ILO IN JANUARY 2024

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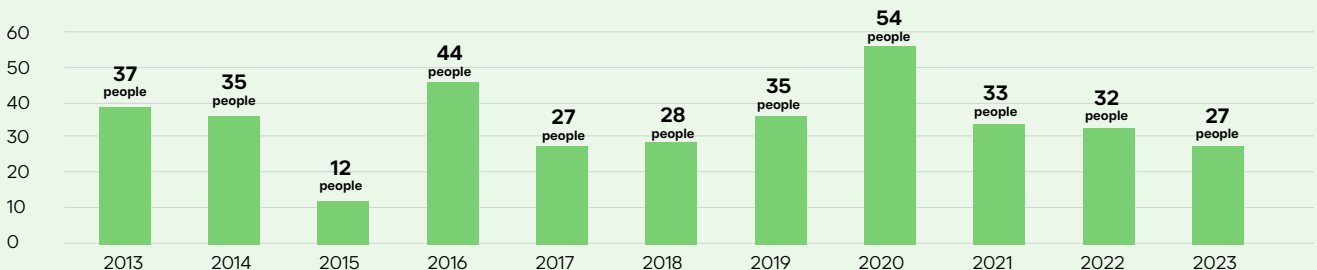
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Source: ILO-ILOSTAT (<https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/safety-and-health-at-work/>)

According to the report published by the *Worker Health and Worker Safety* (OHS) Assembly in 2023, 364 workers lost their lives in the textile industry in the last 10 years. 81 of these workers were women and 283 were men. 98 per cent of those were non-unionised.

2013-2023/DISTRIBUTION OF OCCUPATIONAL FATALITIES IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY BY YEARS



LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES IN TÜRKİYE

Occupational health and safety (OHS) practices in Türkiye are governed by a legal framework shaped by various national regulations, international conventions, and by-laws. This framework aims to improve the health and safety conditions of workers while preventing occupational diseases and work accidents. The legal structure is based on the Constitution, the Labour Law, the *Occupational Health and Safety Law No. 6331*, social security laws, and other regulatory provisions.

The *Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye* guarantees fundamental rights on occupational health and safety. Article 60 states that everyone has the right to social security. Furthermore, the Constitution emphasises the right to work, equal pay for equal work, freedom of unionisation, protection of vulnerable groups, and assurance of a safe working environment. The State is responsible for implementing the necessary measures to ensure these rights.

The *Labour Law No. 4857*, which came into force on June 10, 2003, is one of the primary laws regulating working life in Türkiye. This law contains important regulations on occupational health and safety.¹⁸ It obliges employers to protect the health and safety of employees, strengthen the role of OHS committees, and grants workers the right to refuse work if adequate safety measures are not in place. Furthermore, employers are obliged to provide OHS training, employ workplace physicians, and conduct regular OHS measure inspections. In line with Türkiye's harmonisation process with European Union (EU) directives, the law establishes a framework aligned with international standards.¹⁹



Photo: www.tigrishaber.com

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The *Occupational Health and Safety Law No. 6331*, enacted in 2012, expanded upon this previous regulations to provide a more comprehensive legal basis for OHS practices. Under this law, employers are required to conduct risk assessments, provide OHS training, and implement health and safety measures. Employees are responsible for using safety equipment correctly and participating in safety trainings. The law also mandates the establishment of OHS committees in workplaces according to the size of the company, aiming to prevent occupational accidents and diseases.²⁰

The functioning of the social security system plays also an important role in occupational health and safety. The *Social Security Institution Law No. 5502* and the *Social Insurance and General Health Insurance Law No. 5510* are the laws regulating compensation, healthcare services, and other social security mechanisms related to occupational accidents and diseases.²¹

In addition to overarching laws, various regulations and by-laws provide detailed guidance on OHS practices. The *Regulation on Occupational Health and Safety Committees* defines and regulates the structure and responsibilities of workplace committees, while the *Regulation on the Procedures and Principles of Occupational Health and Safety Training of Employees* sets out the principles for training programs of employees. In addition, the *Regulation on the Duties, Authorities and Responsibilities of Occupational Safety Experts and Workplace Physicians* outlines the roles of safety experts and medical personnel in workplace.²²

EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITY

6331

Occupational Health and Safety Law

WORKERS' RIGHTS AFTER AN OCCUPATIONAL ACCIDENT & DISEASES

5502

Social Security Institution Law

Türkiye's efforts to harmonise with international standards have strengthened the legal framework for OHS practices, and committed to comply with international standards by ratifying ILO conventions. It aims to implement international standards in the field of occupational health and safety by ratifying the Convention No. 155 on Occupational Health and Safety, Convention No. 161 on Health Services, Framework Convention No. 187 on Occupational Health and Safety Promotion, Convention No. 167 on Safety and Health in Construction Work and Convention No. 176 on Safety and Health in Mines.²³

Occupational health and safety inspections in Türkiye are carried out by the Labour Inspection Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. Labour inspectors visit workplaces to assess compliance with legislation regarding working conditions, wages, OHS standards, informal employment, unemployment and child labour. Their goal is to ensure that deficiencies are corrected.²⁴ In addition, occupational health and safety committees are mandatory in large-scale workplaces, bringing together representatives of workers and employers to carry out risk assessments, implement preventive measures, and develop training plans. These inspections are carried out in two ways: Either organised as scheduled inspections focusing on specific sectors or risk groups or as unscheduled inspections based on reports or complaints.

While detailed audit reports are not publicly available, annual evaluations are submitted to the ILO and shared with the public. In 2023, a total of 5,013 OHS inspections were conducted, of which 3,115 were scheduled and 1,898 were unscheduled inspections.²⁵ For the weaving, garment, and leather sectors the breakdown was 507 scheduled and 117 unscheduled inspections.²⁶

In the reports on the garment sector, several key issues such as widespread of unregistered employment, the discrepancies between actual wages and registered wages, violations of overtime work and rest periods, and failure to pay wages through banks were identified.²⁷ It is also noteworthy that legal obligations regarding the employment of disabled and foreign workers are not compliant. Out of a total of 42 work accidents recorded in 2021, 18 resulted in death, 36 were injuries and 4 case of limb loss.²⁸ All recorded occupational accidents in the weaving, garment, and leather sector were machinery-related.²⁹

Despite a robust legal framework, various severe difficulties hinder the effective implementation of occupational health and safety legislation in Türkiye. In particular, problems such as the high prevalence of informal employment, inadequate enforcement of OHS practices in small and medium-sized enterprises, insufficient inspection mechanisms and weak enforcement of sanctions limit the effectiveness of the legislations. These structural issues continue to pose significant obstacles to ensuring safe and healthy working conditions in the garment sector.

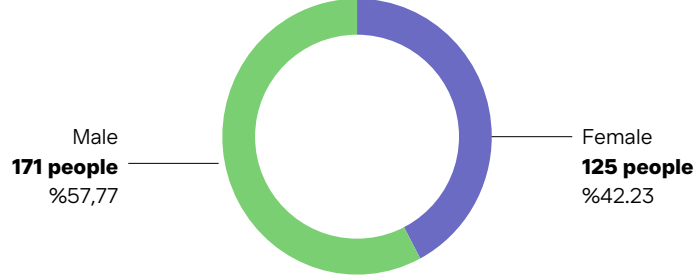
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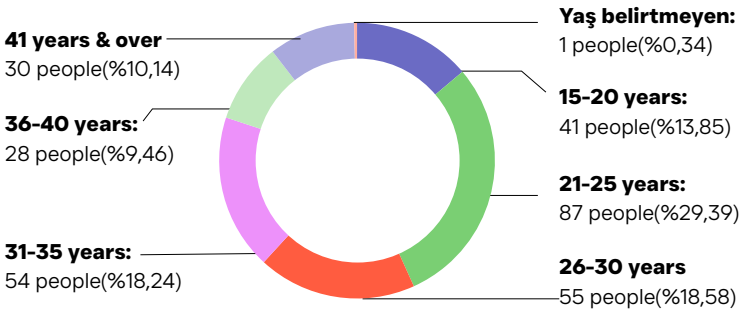
RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research was conducted with a total of 296 garment workers. The gender distribution of the interviewed workers is as follows:

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION



During the interviews, various questions were asked to understand the workers' experiences and views regarding occupational health and safety. It was investigated whether they experienced any physical or psychological discomfort during work. They were also asked about the current situation regarding the use of protective equipment, as well as workplace accessibility, including whether doors remained open and if workers were allowed to go out whenever they wanted. Questions were also asked about the provision of regular occupational health and safety trainings, if fire drills and emergency preparations were at place, and the temperature conditions of the workplace, particularly during summer months, as well as whether inspections by the state or brand representatives took place.

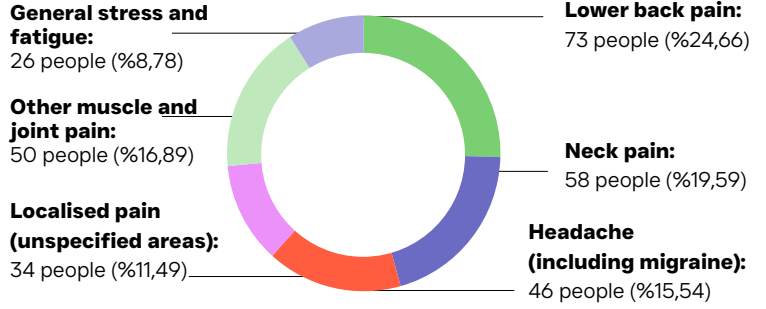
THE MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES IN THE GARMENT SECTOR

Not when I'm working, but when I go home, I get a terrible headache. At home, I feel that everything hurts, even that I'm hungry. In the factory, it's as if they hypnotise me; the senses disappear

Tülay, 27, Malatya

When asked whether they experienced work-related physical or psychological health issues, responses were as follows: In total, 85 out of 296 workers (28.72%) did not make any complaints. The remaining 211 workers (71.28%) expressed different types of discomfort or health issues. The most frequent reported discomforts are as follows:

MOST COMMON HEALTH ISSUES



The most common reported work-related health problems include lumbar, back, and neck pain. Especially workers in packaging and ironing suffer from leg, knee and foot pain, as well as varicose veins due to prolonged standing. Meanwhile, sewing workers suffer from intense back pain due to long hours in the same position for a and non-ergonomic chairs and tables while operating machines. Gülay (22), who works in the sewing department of a garment workshop in Istanbul, describes her experience:

When you use the machines, you have to stay in a position suitable for it, which inevitably causes lower back pain.

Gülay, 22, İstanbul

I have lower back and back pain. Everybody here does.

Dilan, 19, İstanbul

We're hard labourers. Fatigue comes with the job. In this sector, there is no job for those who are not tired. I have all the pains, there is no one without pain. But after a while the pain becomes chronic, you even forget about it.

İlhami, 42, İstanbul



Photo: www.emekvegül.com

I have all kinds of discomfort, hand, neck, back, waist, eyes, head... Everything.

Rasim, 32, İstanbul

Lower back pain comes from working bent over until the evening. My knees are also deteriorating.

İlhan, 52, İstanbul

The most common issue is lower back and back pain due to the work we do.

Zeynep, 21, İstanbul

My lower back, back and feet ache from standing

Selma, 19, İstanbul

I have a hernia; we sit a lot. Naturally, it's a problem."

İbrahim, 36, İstanbul

That's my question. I've got everything –herniated disc, scoliosis, cervical disc hernia.

Müzeyyen, 41, İstanbul

I have a hernia. I got it from working. I'm still young, I'm not going to do any other job. We'll see what happens when I get older. There is already constant pain in the body, I didn't even mention it anymore.

Ahmet, 29, İstanbul

Complaints such as pain in the lower back, back, shoulder, and entire body are a direct consequence of the working conditions of garment workers. Such pains are so widespread that many workers see them as an unavoidable part of the job.

Workers' testimonies highlight how prolonged sitting or standing, repetitive movements and heavy workload turn these health issues into chronic conditions. The lack of ergonomic workplace arrangements and excessive physical demands exacerbate these problems. The fact that workers state that they are used to living with pain shows that they have become accustomed to physical disturbances and accept physical suffering as "part of the job". In particular, chronic conditions such as hernias begin at a young age and raise concerns that it will lead to more serious health problems in later ages. These findings draw attention to the long-term effects of workers' health problems.

Another common discomfort experienced by workers is headaches and eye strain. These pains are often caused by various environmental factors, such as inadequate lighting, high noise levels, lack of ventilation, exposure to dust and chemicals, and stress from heavy workloads. In particular, workers who operate sewing machines suffer from eye strain due to focusing on small details for an extended period:

Before I worked on the machine, I had no problem seeing far. Over time, my eyesight started deteriorated. Now I wear glasses.

Ali, 20, İstanbul

I use glasses because the work requires constant focus. That's how my vision got worse.

Halil, 36, İstanbul

I get headaches from the noise. For example, two, three years ago we were very exposed to a loud machine noise. They only removed it at the end of two to three years. They gave us headphones, but you can't wear them all the time.

Nilay, 42, İstanbul

The fumes from the press and the heat give me a headaches.

Esmâ, 19, İstanbul

I've been working only for 1 year, but I think my eyes have gotten worse in that time.

Samet, 27, İstanbul

I had no eye problems before this job. But it started with the job, I've been wearing glasses for five years.

Hakan, 32, Batman

Headache, I have a lot of migraine, and a very dusty and noisy environment makes me sick.

Fatma, 42, Malatya

Intense headache, from stress.

İrem, 21, Malatya

According to workers, tasks that require prolonged focus on a single point lead to eye fatigue and visual impairment. The increasing number of workers wearing glasses, especially among those operating machinery, is a concrete indicator of this issue. Inadequate lighting and lack of ergonomic arrangements in the working environment further exacerbate this problem.

Headaches are mostly related to factors such as constant noise, chemical fumes, and inadequate ventilation. Noise exposure, in particular, stands out as one of the main causes for workers' headaches and stress-related disorders. While some workers receive protective equipment such as earplugs, they often find them uncomfortable or impractical for continuous use. In addition, the heat and smoke emitted from press machines cause both physical discomfort and headaches.

Beyond physical conditions, the intense workload and high stress levels on workers' overall well-being are also evident. Long working hours, constant mental focus, and physical exhaustion contribute to chronic headaches and a range of other health problems.

Another common complaint is asthma, shortness of breath, and cough, caused by exposure to dust and chemicals:

I swallow a lot of chemical dust during the day, so I also have shortness of breath. And I have foot, waist and back pain because I am on my feet all day. Varicose veins started to occur.

Hatice, 31, Malatya

I have severe stomach problems; we swallow a lot of dust. After we go home in the evening, we wash ourselves. The paint and dust from the jeans always come out of our noses and throats. Since we are in a fixed standing position, we have a lot of back and foot pain. It is very difficult to stand, especially during menstrual periods.

Bahar, 42, Malatya

Lower back pain. And I'm allergic to dust.

Sümeyye, 47, İstanbul

Phlegm and a persistent cough – it's from the chemicals.

Yavuz, 36, İstanbul

Coughing when there's dust.

Hamza, 20, İstanbul

It's fabric dust, we're exposed to chemicals. It causes allergies, I didn't get it, but it happens over time.

Asım, 31, İstanbul

I have a lot of back pain from sitting. There is also phlegm and cough due to dust.

Ramazan, 23, İstanbul

Workers' testimonies highlight the severe long-term health consequences of daily exposure to dust and chemicals. Among these problems, respiratory diseases such as phlegm, persistent cough and asthma stand out.

Chemical substances and fabric dusts turn into chronic diseases over time and seriously reduce the quality of life for workers. Some workers state that, just like back pain, exposure to dust and chemicals becomes "habitual" and normalised after a while.

We are in dust, it has become a habit, it has become normal. I have herniated discs and varicose veins from moving back and forth.

Serap, 28, Batman

We are exposed to chemical dust. Many of our friends get asthma and cancer. I know I got allergies and couldn't breathe for months.

Hacer, 41, Malatya

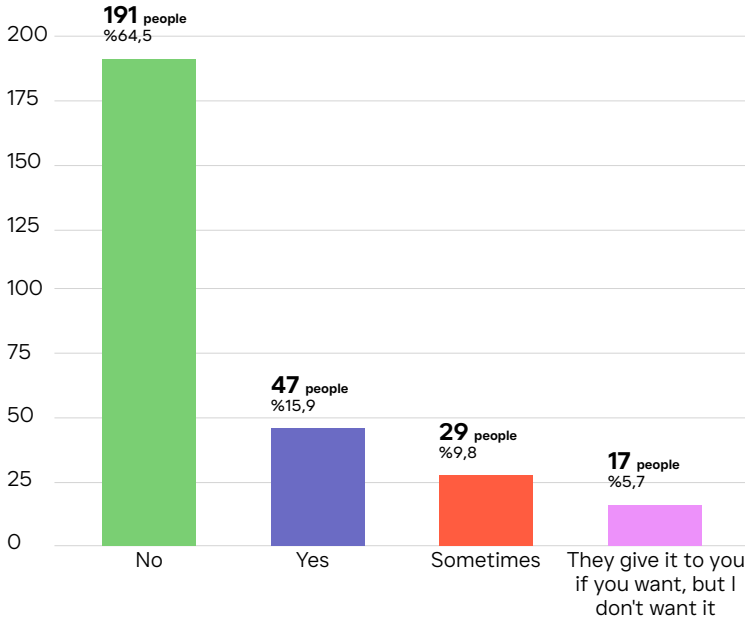
**STOP
WORKPLACE
HOMICIDES!**



USE OF PROTECTING EQUIPMENT

When asked about their use of protective equipment to minimise potential work-related hazards, the majority of workers reported not using any protective gear:

Are you using protecting equipment?



The majority of workers (64.5 %) do not use personal protective equipment. Even among those who are provided with equipment, the regular usage rate is low, with only 15.9 % of workers using protective equipment consistently. Some of the workers (5.7 %) who did not use the equipment provided at the workplace stated that they refused the equipment by their own choice.

The main reason for these preferences is that the work environment is dusty, stuffy and hot, making it difficult to use protective equipment such as masks and gloves. The use of protective gear also varies by departments. Workers in cutting and quality control reported that they do not need equipment due to the nature of their tasks. On the other hand, workers who stated that they “sometimes” use equipment stated that they prefer to wear masks only during periods of increased dust exposure. This situation shows that the use of equipment is not regular and continuous but rather varies based on individual preferences.

A more pressing issue is the lack of provision of critical protective equipment by the employer. For example, one worker pointed out that workers who operate pallet trucks are required to wear steel-toed shoes, yet this equipment is not provided by the employer.

HEAT AND IMMEDIATE PREVENTION

In textile workshops, serious temperature problems due to continuously operating machines, vapour, moisture formation, and inadequate ventilation. Processes such as ironing and dyeing such further intensify the already high temperatures, posing serious health risks.

Excessive heat may cause workers' body temperature to increase, leading to health problems such as heat stress, dizziness, fainting, and heat exhaustion. In the interviews, 198 out of 296 workers stated that the working conditions during summer months are

extremely hot. Although the use of fans, ventilators and air conditioners are common among the measures taken against heat, these solutions are not always sufficient, especially in large working areas or in departments where high heat generating processes such as ironing are carried out. Workers emphasised that even air conditioners fail to provide effective cooling. The statement of one worker summarises the situation:

The department I work in is very huge and the ironing boilers are located in this section. That's why it gets incredibly hot. There are air conditioners, but we don't even feel them, let alone get any relief. We've reported it to the management many times, but unfortunately no one did anything

Bahar, 41, Malatya

It is essential for workers' health and safety that the doors are open in the areas where they work and that they can go out whenever they want. Closed and stuffy environments with poor air circulation increase the risk of heat stress and respiratory issues.

Regular air flow would ensure a healthier working environment. In addition, the ability of workers to go out freely allows them to fulfil their physical and mental rest needs, which reduces the risk of occupational accidents by preventing fatigue and attention loss. Moreover, having open or accessible doors allows for quick evacuation in case of emergencies such as fires. Of the workers interviewed, 178 said that the doors were open while they were working. Some workers stated that they could only go out during break times, while others stated that they could only go out with permission.

Out of 296 workers

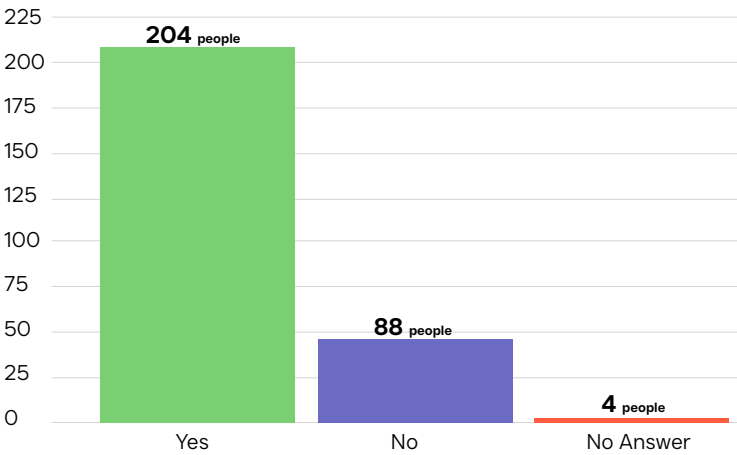
198 worker

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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAININGS

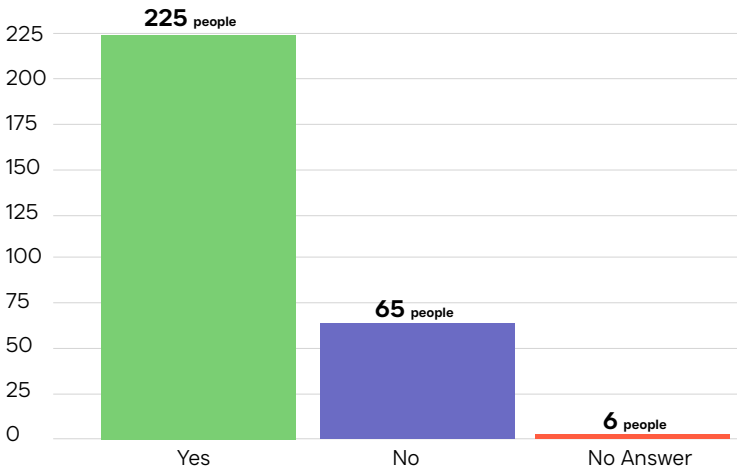
Workers were asked whether they received occupational health and safety trainings. 204 workers stated that they received training, while 88 workers did not receive any training. A regional disparity was observed in access to training: Workers in Anatolian factories generally answered “yes”, while workers in Istanbul answered “no”. These findings reveal that occupational health and safety trainings differ according to the size and location of the factories. In large factories in Anatolia, legal requirements such as the employment of occupational health experts ensure that workers receive training. This increases the likelihood of more regular and comprehensive training. On the other hand, workers in small-scale workshops in Istanbul face difficulties in accessing occupational health and safety training due to less inspection and resource allocation. This suggests that occupational health and safety standards in small enterprises are inadequate and therefore workers lack knowledge about safe working conditions.

Have you received occupational health and safety training?



When asked whether they had participated in fire drills at their workplaces, 225 workers stated that they had taken part in drills, while 65 of them had never participated in one. Notably, some small-scale workshops carried out fire drills despite not offering occupational health and safety trainings. While this suggests an effort to create basic safety awareness, the absence of comprehensive training leaves workers unprepared for broader workplace hazards. In factories located in earthquake-prone cities such as Malatya and Şanlıurfa, workers stated that earthquake drills were conducted in addition to fire drills. This is a crucial practice, ensuring workers are better prepared to respond to disasters.

Have you participated in a fire drill?

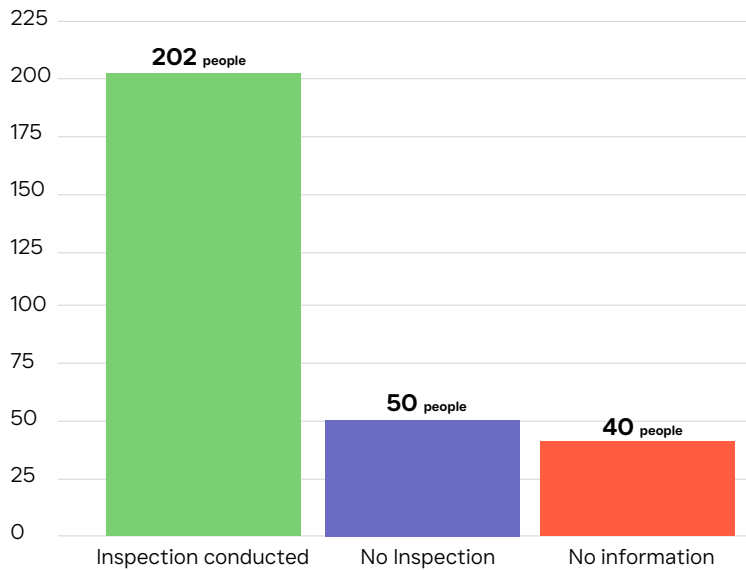


INSPECTION PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Regular workplace inspections are essential for maintaining occupational health and safety standards. However, findings suggest that the effectiveness of these inspections is questionable. While 69 % of interviewed workers (202 people) stated that inspections were carried out in their factories, 17 % (50 people) stated that there were no inspections and 14 % (40 people) stated that they were unaware of any inspections. Even among workplaces that undergo inspections, many workers have limited awareness of how these inspections are conducted. Some workers noted that inspectors meet with workers one-on-one, while others stated that the inspectors only visited the employers’ office without entering actual work areas. This lack of direct engagement with workers raises concerns about whether inspections truly reflect on-the-ground working conditions.

When asked “Has anything changed as a result of the inspection?”, the overwhelming majority of workers answered ‘No, nothing has changed’. This suggests that the inspections are largely ineffective in bringing about concrete improvements in worker health and safety. A few workers mentioned that there were temporary improvements in hygiene or increased food portions was served on days when inspectors came. Such temporary and superficial changes suggest that inspections are only performative and have no impact on achieving lasting improvement to address the real needs of workers.

Is there an inspection in your factory?



Has anything changed as a result of the inspection?

No, nothing has changed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report highlights the current state of occupational health and safety (OHS) in the Turkish garment industry, identifying key risks and structural deficiencies that compromise workers' well-being. The findings indicate that occupational OHS measures in the garment sector remain inadequate, exposing workers to serious health hazards.

Some of the most prevalent issues are occupation-related musculoskeletal disorders, eye fatigue, headaches, and respiratory diseases. Working for prolonged periods on non-ergonomic tables and chairs, repetitive tasks such as sewing, ironing, and packaging contribute to chronic pain in the lower back, back, neck, shoulders, and overall body pain.

Inadequate ventilation and lighting conditions, as well as exposure to dust also pose significant health risks. Workers suffer from eye fatigue and visual impairments due to inadequate lighting or prolonged focus on a single point during detailed tasks. Dense dust and poor air circulation cause respiratory problems such as asthma and coughing. Chemical exposure and excessive noise contribute to headaches and heightened stress levels, particularly given the long and demanding work hours.

Despite these hazards, the use of protective equipment is very low. The majority of workers do not regularly wear personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, and goggles. The main reasons for this are that the use of equipment in a dusty, stuffy and hot working environment makes it difficult to do the job, or employers do not provide such equipment.

The lack of training on occupational health and safety is a more pronounced problem in small and medium-sized enterprises. It is observed that a large percentage of workers in small workshops, especially in Istanbul, do not receive adequate training on occupational health and safety. Although such trainings are more common in factories located in Anatolia, it is unclear to what extent these trainings positively affect the working conditions and health of workers in practice.

The lack of effective inspections is another significant concern. Although some workers report that inspections take place, many describe them as superficial and ineffective, with little to no improvement in working conditions. To address this, inspections must be rigorous, worker-focused, and followed by concrete corrective actions. Inspectors should engage directly with workers, document real conditions on-site, and enforce meaningful sanctions for violations. The textile sector should be included in the inspection agenda of the Ministry of Labour, ensuring that violations lead to tangible improvements rather than performative compliance.

A comprehensive approach is required to reduce and prevent occupational health and safety risks in the textile industry.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- **Adequate ventilation systems to reduce heat, moisture and dust accumulation**
- **Noise reduction measures to protect workers from hearing damages**
- **Strong chemical safety management to minimise exposure to toxic substances**
- **Ergonomic arrangements, such as adjustable workstations and seating to reduce musculoskeletal disorders**
- **Fire safety measures to ensure clear evacuation routes in facilities**

Moreover, workload distribution should be carefully managed to prevent exhaustion and injury. In addition, more effective inspections will make it possible to assess the real conditions in workplaces and to eliminate deficiencies. Special policy measures should be developed for vulnerable groups, such as women and migrant workers, to ensure equitable access to safe working conditions.³⁰

One of the most pressing structural issues in the Turkish garment industry is the prevalence of unregistered (informal) employment, which has almost become the norm in the garment sector. Combating unregistered employment is of great importance in terms of raising general occupational health and safety standards in the sector, since informal employment causes inadequate occupational health and safety measures and increases the risks even more. Informal workers work in even more unsafe conditions due to lack of supervision and have limited access to health services. Moreover, the prevalence of unregistered employment makes it difficult for statistics on occupational accidents and occupational diseases to reflect their real dimensions.

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