genealogy

MDPI

Article

The Hell of the Subcontract: Syrian Refugees in Istanbul's Clothing Industry

Basem Mahmud * and Rosa M. Soriano-Miras

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology, C/ Rector López Argüeta, S/N, 18071 Granada, Spain; rsoriano@ugr.es
* Correspondence: ma7basem@gmail.com

Abstract: This article investigates the employment conditions of Syrian refugee workers in the clothing industry in Istanbul, as well as its consequences on their socio-emotional well-being and life plans. 62 interviews in the form of life stories were conducted with these workers from workspaces of varying sizes. The research identifies ambiguity, hyper-precarity, institutional violence, and segregation (refugees mostly work in small workshops) as the main concepts for understanding these conditions. The dimensions of socio-emotional well-being are dominated by depression and loss of control over life. However, the personal (self) dimension (proud, optimistic, and staying positive with oneself) remains high. As a result, migration outside of Turkey emerges as as ongoing hope in the pursuit of stability and control over the future.

Keywords: consumption; emotions; labor market; migration; refugee worker; textile industry

Received: 12 March 2025
Revised: 6 May 2025
Accepted: 15 May 2025
Published: 20 May 2025

Citation: Mahmud, Basem, and Rosa M. Soriano-Miras. 2025. The Hell of the Subcontract: Syrian Refugees in Istanbul's Clothing Industry. *Genealogy* 9: 55. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy9020055

1. Introduction

Turkey has established itself as a key competitor in the international textile and clothing market, challenging leading exporters such as China (Bayraktar and Şeker 2022). It ranks seventh in the world in the export of clothing, and third among suppliers to Europe (Ministry of Trade—Republic of Turkey 2024). Most of the clothing companies in Turkey are located in Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, Denizli, Gaziantep, and Kahramanmarash (Karabag et al. 2012). After the Syrian uprising in March 2011, Turkey became the country with the greatest number of Syrian refugees in the world. Initially, most of these refugees moved to border cities, especially Gaziantep. Over time, however, Istanbul became the primary destination for those seeking new opportunities to improve the conditions of their lives; in April 2016, the number of registered Syrians in Istanbul was 394,556; in April 2017, it became 479,555, and in April 2022, it reached 542,045 (Refugees Association 2022). However, they have also been facing new challenges in Istanbul specifically because of their status. Despite being a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Turkey does not grant official refugee status and instead offers conditional, subsidiary, and temporary protection. Syrians receive temporary protection, which significantly limits their access to legal employment and stable living conditions, making them extremely vulnerable. Most Syrians in Turkey originate from rural areas and had no prior industrial labor experience (Korkmaz 2017, p. 8). Additionally, on arrival, they were unfamiliar with the Turkish language, and Turkey's migration system drove migrants to work in informal sectors (Nimer and Rottmann 2021, p. 767). Due to the substantial proportion of informal labor within the textile industry, this sector became one of the more available forms of work for Syrian refugees arriving in Turkey, which explains the rapid rise in Syrian textile workers in Turkey over the past decade (cf. Hagemann 2015,

p. 15). Workers in the unregulated sector of this industry had little choice but to endure harsh working conditions and received meager wages, given their precarious legal status (Yılmaz 2020, p. 594).

This article critically examines the employment conditions of Syrian refugee workers within Istanbul's clothing factories and workshops, drawing on interviews (life stories) conducted between 2020 and 2021 with 62 individuals employed by the textile industry in Istanbul. Our findings revealed the nuanced effects of these working conditions on the subjective well-being of Syrian refugee workers. We approach subjective well-being not solely as an individual or personal matter, but as something deeply embedded in the social context. Accordingly, we examine their emotional responses to social interactions both within the workplace and in the broader environment surrounding it. Yet, we also learned about the strategies of resilience these individuals developed as they spoke about their dreams, and the ways in which they strived to enhance their living conditions and the lives of their children. By shedding light on these dynamics, we advocate for targeted interventions and policy responses that prioritize the well-being and livelihoods of refugees in urban centers like Istanbul, who contribute to the city's economy on the one hand, while being subject to persistent exclusion and inequality on the other. The article therefore contributes rich empirical material to the ongoing debates concerning inclusive urban development and social equity. Especially in relation to the current situation in Syria following the sudden collapse of the Assad regime, with growing attention to questions of post-war reconstruction.

How does the employment situation of refugee workers in the clothing industry in Istanbul influence their everyday lives, expectations, and plans? This question has served as a key focus of our research, and it entails two specific objectives: (1) To analyze the working conditions and the labor market of the textile industry in Istanbul as well as the presence of Syrian refugees in the occupational structure of these companies. As well as working conditions, we also wanted to (2) understand refugee workers' socio-emotional well-being. Adopting Eduardo Bericat Alastuey's definition, this means "a general and relatively stable emotional state that indicates the emotional evaluation, positive or negative, that an individual makes of the results of the totality of his/her social interactions" (Bericat 2014, p. 606). In addition to the introduction and conclusion, this article comprises five distinct sections. Section 2 offers a theoretical review of the interaction between Istanbul's textile industry, the Turkish migration system, and its effects on refugee working conditions. Section 3 outlines the methodology and sample. Section 4 analyzes work conditions using field data, focusing on ambiguity, extreme hyper-precarity, and segregation. Section 5 discusses the subjective well-being implications for refugees. Finally, Section 6 explores their future plans, ultimately advocating for a comprehensive approach to address the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in urban settings.

2. The Textile Industry in Istanbul and Turkey's Migration Regime

Istanbul, a city that separates Asia from Europe, has become one of the most important destinations for migrants seeking work in the new economic system since 1950 (Guven 2017, p. 1). The city's population grew significantly when it began to adopt proactive industrial relocation policies, and it would later become one of the most important destinations for industrial relocation (OECD 2008). Due to heavy immigration, population growth in Istanbul is almost double the overall rate for all of Turkey (van Leeuwen and Sjerps 2016, p. 1). The data indicates that Istanbul constitutes 18.3% of Turkey's total population (Oruc and Yildirim 2025). This became a very profitable situation for international companies because it created an abundance of relatively cheap labor in a country with a huge informal economy. With around 3.5 million workers engaged in the informal sector as of 2019.

The earnings of these workers support over 10 million household members (Duman and Duman 2021, p. 2). According to the country's Ministry of Economy, as of February 2014 a total of 37,737 companies have operations in Turkey with international capital, of which 22,370 are based in Istanbul (Anadolu Agency 2014). By the end of 2023, the number of these companies in Turkey reached 82,715 (of which 14,862 are Syrian refugee enterprises) (United State Department of Agriculture 2024, p. 4). This intertwining of economic growth and migration flows reflects how Turkey's neoliberal economic agenda has leveraged migration not only as a demographic shift but as a labor policy tool.

Turkey's success as a clothing export country is usually attributed to its close geographical position to European markets, which facilitates the logistics of import and export operations (Karabag et al. 2012; Textiles Intelligence 2021), as well as to its richness in cotton (it produces around 450 to 500 thousand tons per year). In the Istanbul metropolitan area, the textile industry is the largest manufacturing sector, accounting for 39% of the manufacturing companies in Istanbul (Alkay and Hewings 2012, p. 236). While international apparel companies have historically produced in Asian countries, particularly after the offshoring of textile industry sites from the UK/EU in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a McKinsey survey of executives and managers of apparel companies located in Europe and the US detected a shift to the nearshore market among these companies (Andersson et al. 2018), brought about by their need for more flexibility and speed in shipping. From China, shipping takes almost 30 days, while shipping from Turkey needs only 3–4 days. Air transportation does not solve the problem due to its high costs. Furthermore, while "hourly manufacturing labor costs in Turkey were more than 5 times higher than those in China in 2005, the factor diminished to only a factor of 1.6 times by 2017", (Andersson et al. 2018, p. 10). The report confirms that when asked about their company's most important nearshore market by 2025, the survey respondents answered as follows: in the case of those nearshoring for Europe, 29% said Turkey, followed by Morocco (10%) (Andersson et al. 2018, p. 9). In sum, Turkey has benefited substantially from the shift in apparel production toward nearshore markets. All of this makes Istanbul an attractive place for those seeking work, and many refugees move from other cities in Turkey to Istanbul.

One of the prominent features of Istanbul's garment industry is its heavy reliance on informal labor. This sector plays a significant role in reducing costs and increasing the industry's competitiveness, but it also leads to increased social and economic instability for workers as they lack legal protections and are subject to exploitation. The flexible organization of work that depends largely on subcontracts allows for reducing fixed costs and results in lower labor costs for firms (cf. Dedeoğlu 2021, p. 100; Hagemann and Beyer 2020, p. 15). This type of work organization occurs between large or medium firms and small workshops, or between firms or small workshops and home-based workers. Most small workshops work informally, as is the case in other places like Mexico and, specifically, in Tehuacan (cf. Requena et al. 2021). Indeed, informality is generally a way of life for the world's poor and a means of survival for small textile firms (Birch 2019; Dedeoğlu 2021, p. 101). Subcontracts differ depending on the needs of the firm holding the main contract. The small workshops complete a necessary quantity within a given time or provide a specific service such as packing, ironing, cleaning, etc. As such, they "stand at the heart of subcontracting chains providing backward linkages to factory production and enable the industry to reach untapped sources of low-wage women and children" (Dedeoğlu 2021, p. 101), and of course refugees. Such labor dynamics do not only impact wages and legal status but also create emotional distress and a persistent sense of insecurity among workers, particularly for refugees trapped in uncertain legal and spatial conditions.

This engagement in the informal sector is not merely a matter of opportunity, but rather a reflection of structural constraints that limit refugees' ability to access formal employment

channels. Given the historical context of Istanbul's textile sector and its reliance on informal labor, Syrian refugees, fleeing their country since the 2011 uprising, have increasingly become part of this labor market. As a result, the precarious labor conditions that had been established for local workers are now extended to refugees, exacerbating their vulnerability under Turkey's migration laws and policies. This influx further fueled the informal labor market, where Syrians filled low-wage jobs in textile factories and workshops. While Turkey has implemented certain policies to address the needs of refugees, including work permits for Syrians, these measures have often been limited and poorly enforced. Consequently, many Syrian refugees continue to work in informal settings, without access to social services or legal protections, further reinforcing the cycle of exploitation and marginalization. Research focusing on informal workshops in Istanbul found that 97.7% of the workers work overtime, and almost all Syrian refugees work without insurance, while the rate is 46.6% for Turkish men and 67.8% for Turkish women (cited in Oral 2019, p. 460). These dynamics are closely intertwined with Turkey's migration policies, as the country's system has not always been able to provide the necessary legal and social protections for refugees. These policies, largely focused on managing refugees' legal status, often lack clear strategies for effectively integrating them into society.

These details show that Turkey's migration regime developed in a way that serves its labor market (Nawyn 2016; Nimer and Rottmann 2021) and the security interests of European countries (Çetin 2020). In 2016, the main debate in Europe focused on restricting migration and sharing the refugee burden, with Turkey emerging as a key gatekeeper (Sirkeci 2017). The consequences of Turkey's migration regime are well explained by Cetin who writes that it "focuses too much on the regulatory aspects of the refugee issue and fails to address the essential needs of the refugees within a long-term goal of eventual integration" (Çetin 2020, p. 549). We see this as a result of Turkey's dual motivation: to deal with European challenges while conserving its national interest at the same time. It is a multilayered migration regime based on legal, social, and political ambiguity that creates many obstacles for refugees in their everyday lives in Turkey (Genç et al. 2018). At the legal level, temporary protection is an ambiguous status because refugees are neither granted rights nor provided with a path to nationality. Suzan Ilcan, Kim Rygiel, and Feyzi Baban refer to the ambiguous architecture of precarity, including precarity of status, precarity of space or access to services, and precarity of movement since refugees are deprived of their rights to mobility (Ilcan et al. 2018, p. 1). This leads us to consider the precarity of status, space, and movement, a framework that illustrates how refugees' mobility, social space, and legal status are intertwined in complex ways. In the case of Syrian refugees in Istanbul, their movement is not only constrained by legal barriers but also by spatial limitations within the city, as they are often restricted to informal sectors and marginalized areas. Moreover, they face significant restrictions on their ability to move between cities and regions, which limits their access to better employment opportunities. These factors converge to create a labor force that is highly exploitable—unable to move freely and without the rights and protections afforded to others in the formal labor market. They are left without any legal or organizational support, in the worst working conditions in the labor market, and with unclear information about their rights. Other researchers have found that refugees they interviewed in Turkey were worried that formal work would lead to more exploitation by employers than their current situation (Van Hear et al. 2018). These lived experiences of marginalization—marked by exploitative labor, limited mobility, and ambiguous status—culminate in an intensified form of precarity.

This combination of ambiguity and precarity (economic, legal, and social) is translated into an extreme hyper-precarity for refugee workers (cf. Nimer and Rottmann 2022). Hyper-precarity encapsulates the extreme insecurity of labor that refugees experience. This concept

goes beyond traditional understandings of precarious work, highlighting how refugees, particularly Syrians in Istanbul, are caught in a constant state of vulnerability. They are not only subjected to unstable employment conditions but also live under the constant threat of legal and social exclusion. This precariousness is further amplified by their ambiguous legal status, which renders their labor both invisible and disposable in the eyes of the state and employers alike. Furthermore, there is evidence suggesting a shift in migration policy in Turkey towards promoting a "voluntary" return of refugees (For example, some returnees were forced to sign voluntary return forms under pressure, even though they initially did not want to return. This was a condition for being allowed to leave Turkey and cross into Syria) (Mencutek 2022). However, this so-called "voluntary" return may not truly be voluntary for the refugees themselves, as it is presented as such by Turkish authorities or policymakers. Refugees, especially those who do not have temporary protection, live in constant fear of encountering state officials, particularly random identity checks by the police (Mencutek 2022). In circumstances such as these, planning becomes exceptionally challenging for refugees. As our research found, their feelings of estrangement intensify in a new and unfamiliar place. As will be presented in the results section, during the interviews, participants often used sarcasm as a way to cope, making the harsh and unfamiliar feel more relatable.

Amidst this uncertainty, Syrian refugees are forced to accept work in harsh conditions with limited rights. This environment contributes to the persistence of poverty and discrimination in the labor market. They face general challenges as refugees, but they also encounter specific difficulties as workers in the clothing industry. This highlights the different layers that characterize their high vulnerability. The industry operates in parallel with the migration regime, which often conflicts with the refugees' needs and interests. While the former relates to the organization of work in the production process (subcontracting), the latter is tied to the consumption process.

Changes in consumption patterns (fast fashion) require adaptation in the production process, which is dependent on precarious migrant labor (Requena et al. 2015, p. 125). The shift from ready-to-wear to 'fast fashion' that has occurred over the past 20 years brings with it new challenges for workers. Fast fashion is "based on increased variety, flexibility and permanently shrinking product life cycles that require bringing new products to markets at an increasing pace and in shorter periods. This implies not only increased organizational flexibility and shrinking lead times for supplier firms but also delivering high-quality apparel items at low cost" (Plank et al. 2014, p. 127). This requires a high level of control, especially in the big factories (a large number of supervisors and cameras). Workers are not allowed to answer their phones, to speak with one another, use headphones, drink coffee, etc., forcing them into inhuman working conditions which have a direct effect on their health (Bick et al. 2018; Taplin 2014). Korkmaz (2017) analyzed the situation of Syrian refugees in the Turkish garment industry specifically and found that transnational corporations/brands apply pressure on their suppliers to produce more quickly and with fewer costs. This pressure is then "transferred to workers by suppliers, and which feeds the informal economy as suppliers strive to produce more in a shorter time with lower costs" (Korkmaz 2017, p. 16). This means that the situation of refugee workers cannot be addressed without considering industrial relocation, and all of its accompanying disadvantages for the situation of local workers. However, many studies about refugee workers in various locations in Turkey demonstrate that they have an even more precarious situation than locals (see Ünlütürk Ulutaş 2016). One study found that "precarious organizational practices translate national particularities into individual feelings of exclusion and exploitation of refugees, especially female refugees" (Knappert et al. 2018, p. 76).

The synergy between the production regime of subcontracting, evolving consumption patterns in the form of fast fashion, and the reliance on refugee labor is complex. The flexibility and efficiency of subcontracting align with the demands of the rapid cycles of fast fashion. However, this arrangement leverages the social and legal precarity of refugees and exploits their vulnerability to cut costs. This interplay underscores how economic structures exploit marginalized groups to meet transient consumer demands. Furthermore, Turkey's migration regime, while aiming to serve its labor market, creates challenges for the integration and security of refugees. Amid these dynamics, refugee workers face institutional violence, as their rights remain unprotected by the state's formal structures, forcing them into the most vulnerable positions in the labor hierarchy—subcontracting. Institutional violence refers to the policies, practices, and actions of public institutions or officials that result in both tangible and intangible harm to specific individuals or groups (Atal 2024, p. 2). This form of violence often operates in a hidden, systemic manner, embedded within the bureaucratic and economic systems that normalize exploitation and marginalization. While personal violence may be easily identified as a violation, institutional violence is more insidious, reinforcing inequalities without drawing overt attention (Galtung 1969, p. 173). In this context, refugee workers experience not only economic deprivation but also emotional responses such as frustration, humiliation, and a diminished sense of agency. These emotions contribute to a broader sense of disconnection and alienation from the host society, revealing that institutional violence extends beyond the legal and economic spheres to affect the intimate, emotional aspects of displacement. This exclusionary dynamic further entrench the refugees' social invisibility and dependency, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and marginalization.

3. Weaving Methodological Pathways

To achieve the research objectives related to understanding the influence of the employment situation of refugee workers in Istanbul's clothing industry on their everyday lives, expectations, and future plans, life story interviews were conducted face-to-face with Syrian interlocutors in Istanbul between March 2020 and January 2021 (during the COVID-19 pandemic). This interview method provides a deep, nuanced understanding of their lived experiences, work conditions, and emotional responses (Issari et al. 2021, p. 1544). The interviews were conducted in Arabic. For two Kurdish participants and two deaf and speech-impaired workers, translation assistance was provided, with translators being relatives of the interviewees. Interviews were arranged through connections with colleagues in Istanbul, primarily within NGOs, to establish trust and familiarity. Notably, contact was never initiated through workers' supervisors or workplace owners, and interview locations were always chosen by the participants.

Grounded theory strategies were employed as they enable a focus on the experiences of forced migration and employment in Istanbul from the respondents' perspectives, without the imposition of predefined theoretical frameworks or concepts. Grounded theory uses theoretical sampling, allowing us to interview and analyze data simultaneously rather than starting with a fixed list of participants. After each interview, we evaluated our findings to determine the next participants, enabling us to adjust our questions and focus on unresolved areas. This approach led to a reduction in interview duration from two hours to about one hour in later sessions.

Although we recorded the interviews, we ensure participants' confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms. The sample included Syrian refugee workers who live in Istanbul and work in the clothing industry. We interviewed 62 individuals, and considered relevant socio-demographic variables including gender, age, legal status, education, and civil status (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample distribution.

Gender		**Legal status**	
Male	42	Temporary protection	53
Female	20	Residence permit	5
Age		Not registered	4
less than 18	6	**Civil status**	
18–25	22	Married	25
26–35	17	Separated	1
36 and more	17	Divorced	2
Education		Widower-Widow	1
Without official studies	2	Single	33
Primary school (6 years)	25		
middle school (3 years)	23		
Secondary school (3 years)	12		

The majority of our interlocutors reported that their health has been negatively affected by their working conditions. The most common health issues they identified were back and neck pain, knee problems, respiratory issues, asthma, high blood pressure, work-related accidents, tuberculosis, and failure to thrive. These health problems varied depending on both the worker's primary task and age. This finding aligns with previous research on the impact of the textile industry on workers' physical health (Metgud et al. 2008; Singh 2016). However, there is limited understanding of how these conditions affect workers' emotional well-being. This gap in knowledge is largely due to the fact that most studies in this area are conducted by psychologists, who typically use a questionnaire with a single question about happiness (see Bericat and Acosta 2021, p. 713). To address this gap, we administered a quantitative questionnaire within a structured interview format. This approach allowed us to collect socio-demographic data and information relevant to Bericat's (2014) socio-emotional index. Understanding subjective well-being, particularly in the context of refugees living under extraordinary and seemingly endless circumstances, cannot be limited to individual, personal aspects alone. Therefore, it was essential to employ a measure that also accounts for the broader social context. The strength of Bericat's index lies in its holistic approach, as it integrates both the individual and structural dimensions of well-being. Consequently, it provides a comprehensive assessment of subjective well-being across four key dimensions (Bericat and Acosta 2021). We examined these dimensions by analyzing refugee workers' evaluations of their interactions (status), their sense of self (self), their situation, and their social power.

1. Situation factor: The individual's evaluation of their own happiness and enjoyment within the objective conditions of their situation in life. This dimension is particularly relevant given the social isolation and marginalization that refugee workers often experience.
2. Person factor: the individual's self-esteem or strength, i.e., level of pride and optimism related to personal conditions: how refugees' living conditions and work circumstances in Istanbul influence their self-esteem.
3. Interaction factor: The individual's level of sadness, depression, and loneliness related to social interaction with others. This factor is especially significant for refugees, as forced displacement has uprooted them from their homes, communities, and support

networks—leading to profound emotional disconnection and increased vulnerability to social isolation.

4. Control factor: the manner and degree of control or power the individual has over the main elements of their environment. In this factor the index measures calmness, rest, and vital energy. For refugee workers, this factor is closely linked to their sense of agency and resilience in navigating conditions marked by vulnerability, precarity, and ambiguity.

We did not use the questionnaire as a stand-alone tool; rather, we integrated it as a supplementary means to enhance the interpretive dimension of our qualitative study. Our primary methodology is based on in-depth interviews and grounded theory analysis. However, the questionnaire allowed us to trace general patterns related to socio-emotional well-being across both structural and individual dimensions. Nevertheless, we did not subject the questionnaire data to quantitative analysis, as our aim was not to test hypotheses or produce statistical generalizations. Instead, we used these data as contextual background to broaden our understanding of the meaning participants ascribe to their working conditions and subjective experiences. This contextual use contributed to deepening the qualitative analysis without compromising its inductive nature.

4. Working Conditions: Ambiguity, Extreme Hyper-Precarity, and Segregation

Most textile factories in Istanbul are small or medium-sized (INGEV 2019, p. 4). This organizational structure allows companies to balance the need for low-cost production while maintaining quality that satisfies customers, on the one hand, and projecting an image of respecting workers' rights, on the other. Large companies typically hire or contract a large factory, which in turn subcontracts smaller factories, both within and outside Istanbul. This subcontracting system allows larger companies to avoid responsibility beyond their agreements with the factories, which generally adhere to legal standards; large factories make contracts directly with workers and stipulate work shifts with fewer hours (9–10 h daily) than is usually the case in small- and medium-sized factories (11–12 h or even more). By doing so, they just about 'comply with the law' (cf. Goethals and Korkmaz 2018, p. 21). Workers in subcontracted factories, however, often face informal employment arrangements, excessive working hours, and extremely low wages.

Istanbul attracts refugees seeking employment. In fact, most participants reported coming to Istanbul due to its higher chances of employment compared to other Turkish cities. This reflects the broader socio-economic conditions faced by refugees in other parts of Turkey. Others arrived through social networks, such as family connections or knowing someone already living there. Before migrating, a significant proportion of Istanbul's refugee workforce had prior experience in the textile industry in their home countries. Those without previous experience in this sector began working in it upon arriving in Istanbul, although some had spent time in other Turkish cities before settling there.

The primary difference in employment conditions between refugees and locals is that refugees generally receive lower wages for performing the same tasks. They work without health insurance, contracts, or legal protections. While this can occasionally be the case for local workers as well, it occurs less frequently, reflecting a clear disparity in access to labor rights—such as health insurance and legal contracts—between locals and refugees. Furthermore, providing a contract to a refugee often requires paperwork that many employers either avoid or lack the knowledge to complete. As Iyad explains:

> "They want to avoid problems. . .When I began doing the necessary paperwork for registration, in the factory they did not know how to fill out the online application. They were calling others [to ask]".

Male, 35 years old, 6 years in Istanbul, model maker

Refugees find themselves trapped in a system that primarily serves the production sector; in the absence of legal protections and policies that promote their lawful employment, they remain in a state of extreme precarity. This entrenches their vulnerability and reflects the structural discrimination that sustains this unsustainable status quo. Local workers, on the other hand, have access to larger factories, where they enjoy better working conditions, shorter hours, contracts, health insurance, and other benefits. Meanwhile, refugees are compelled to continue working primarily in small- and medium-sized factories, reinforcing the emergence of fragmented social classes within the labor market. This situation not only reinforces the perception that refugees do not contribute to the tax system but also heightens tensions with the local working class. Refugees are often viewed as a competitive labor force that threatens locals' livelihoods, as they are willing to work for much lower wages, benefiting employers at the expense of local workers. This mechanism reflects "institutional violence", where state structures, such as labor laws and immigration policies, intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate systemic inequalities and exploitative labor practices. The absence of adequate legal frameworks and the deliberate disregard for refugees' rights create a context in which exploitation and vulnerability are normalized. Policies and practices effectively isolate refugees from full societal participation, marginalizing them and reinforcing social divisions. The tension with the local working class arises from the structural conditions that prevent refugees from accessing decent work, health insurance, and social benefits, while simultaneously exploiting them as a cheap labor force. However, understanding why so few refugees work in big factories requires going beyond the analysis of the economic and legal aspects of working conditions. We refer here to emotions in the workplace, especially those related to dignity and recognition.

Small factories are typically established by former textile workers, relatives, and friends, with these social networks often creating a more flexible and less stressful work environment. They are often more flexible in dealing with their workers, which helps to create a better atmosphere of work; better relationships with managers, less stress and discrimination in treatment and salary, and better relations among the workers themselves. Here, the social network that they have from their country of origin plays an important role. In one workshop, one may find many workers from the same town in Syria. This creates a more friendly work atmosphere leading many Syrians to seek this kind of workshop before others. One of our research participants explained how he moved from a bigger factory to a smaller one:

> "There you are just a piece in a machine, here, even though work is not assured during the whole year, you feel that you are among people who understand you and share many things with you".[1]

Omar, male, 24 years old, 5 years in Istanbul, tailor

It appears paradoxical that major corporations resort to subcontracting to improve their image, yet the outcome leads to a preference for smaller, informal workshops among the refugee population, despite the challenging conditions of such workshops. This resonates with De Neve's (2014) findings in his research about Indian garment workers' critique of neoliberal labor regimes. He found that workers "avoid large compliant, Fordist firms and instead opt for employment in non-compliant, flexible workshops. Workers' preference for such firms reveals how they wish to avoid Fordist regimes and corporate regulatory interventions that rob them of control over their own labour, freedom and dignity at work". (De Neve 2014, p. 204). However, this is not the only avoidance strategy. Others, like 18-year-old Walid—who started working in this industry in Istanbul when he was 12 years

old—prefer to continue working as a day laborer despite the humiliation of waiting in the street for a factory or workshop owner to come and offer them work:

> "I don't feel as tired, psychologically I mean, as I feel in a steady job. This way, I go there, I finish my job and I go home. No more discussion... Waiting is a humiliating act, however, it is still better for me than suffering humiliation in a steady job, because you will be exposed to it all the time".
>
> Male, 18 years old, 7 years in Istanbul, tailor

Most refugee workers are tailors. The job of runner is usually performed by minors and in some cases women. Women usually work in the final stage of production, which may include wrapping, packaging, removing extra threads from a piece, or decorating it. In all cases, the main criterion when choosing workers is how fast they can complete a required task. Those who have worked as tailors in Syria complain that their experience does not seem relevant because factories here do not operate in the same way. In Syria, they used to work on one piece from beginning to end, which is more of a handmade process. Therefore, they feel that their skill and experience could be useful. As Sennett (2009, p. 33) explains, the craftsman can take pride in his work. In Istanbul, however, there is a greater division of labor, where each worker completes the same repetitive task (for example, fixing a sleeve). The type of Fordist production line work that they are required to do in Turkey increase their feelings of alienation.

Our interlocutors complained how the phrase "come on, hurry up" accompanied them all the time. Not only do they need to produce quickly but also with precision. This complaint was common in all cases, regardless of gender or age. This is due to the nature of the subcontracts: large companies want to keep production costs low (requiring workers to work quickly) and at a suitable level of quality (requiring workers to work with a high level of precision). In this way, small factory workers find themselves at the bottom of a series of pressures: pressure on the big factory contracted in Istanbul, which also pressures the subcontracted small factories, resulting in an extremely tense work atmosphere. As one of the participants explains, the atmosphere becomes more stressful when there is an order (subcontract) from a big factory:

> "I believe that this treatment is because the big companies make very strict conditions in their contracts. If there is any mistake in any piece, they do not pay for them. For this reason, they deal with us in this way when we make any mistake..."
>
> Samar, Female, 17 years old, 7 years in Istanbul, runner

The salary of a tailor is usually the highest, usually around TRY 3000 (EUR 300) monthly.[2] It is useful to mention that when the fieldwork was carried out, Turkey's monthly minimum wage was TRY 2943 (around EUR 325) (Countryeconomy 2022). To put this in perspective, the cost of renting an apartment in a peripheral neighborhood where most of our interlocutors live (like Esenyurt, Zeytinburnu, and Bağcılar) would be about TRY 1000 (around EUR 110).

On the other hand, researchers (Fehr and Rijken 2022, p. 9; Yalçın 2016, p. 93) have found that the Istanbul textile industry has the highest concentration of Syrian refugee child labor among the city's labor sectors. This structure also allows the maximum exploitation of minors; the majority of runners receive less than TRY 1500 (EUR 150), which is equivalent to about half of the minimum monthly wage; only a few are paid between 1500 and TRY 3000 (EUR 150–300); almost none of them reach the minimum wage. The same applies to other workers, except those who are very highly qualified (such as designers).

The majority of our research participants worked alone, though minors and female workers preferred to work with a family member if possible. Most participants usually

do not have other sources of income. Those who indicated additional sources of income referred mainly to the work of one or more family members, and/or to aid received from the Red Crescent.

In addition to the local discrimination against refugees and the exploitation of minors, gender discrimination is also nourished by the subcontract system. Since women usually work in the final stages of production, they engage more often than men in piecework (which can also be performed from home, because in many cases this does not require a machine or other specific instrument). Their work is not measured by hours but is paid by the number of finished pieces, revealing a labor structure marked by gender inequality. This division of labor, where men tend to be assigned more stable, hourly paid tasks while women are relegated to piecework, directly impacts the payment structure, reinforcing gendered inequalities in both task allocation and compensation. This situation reveals a multilayered system in which economic marginalization, legal uncertainty, and institutional disregard converge. The resulting configuration generates structural violence—not merely through oversight or regulatory gaps, but through the intentional organization of labor markets that continuously position refugees as expendable. What emerges is a labor regime where precarity is not a byproduct, but a foundational feature structured by multiple forms of discrimination.

This section underscores the pervasive ambiguity, hyper-precarity, and segregation experienced by refugee workers in Istanbul's textile industry, revealing systemic injustices that perpetuate their vulnerability and marginalization within the labor market. Below we focus on the effects of factor work on these workers' social–emotional well-being.

5. The Impact of Factory Work on Socio-Emotional Well-Being: Depression and Loss of Control over Life

The difficult working conditions, as discussed earlier, have a profound impact on the social and emotional well-being of workers. Based on Bericat's (2014) socio-emotional index, which highlights the interaction between social and emotional dimensions in shaping individuals' experiences, we now turn to study how these conditions manifest in emotional dimensions. The uncertainty, limited opportunities, and marginalization experienced by workers in the textile industry in Istanbul significantly contribute to increased emotional pressure, leading many workers to suffer from feelings of pervasive depression and a lack of life enjoyment. These emotional challenges are further exacerbated by the absence of social recognition and institutional support, both of which are crucial factors for dignity and well-being. In the following section, we will delve deeper into these emotional dimensions, taking into account the personal and social factors that shape workers' perceptions of themselves and their relationship with their environment.

5.1. The Dimensions of Interaction (Status) and Situation: The Dominance of Depression and the Absence of Life Enjoyment

The majority of participants in our study stated that they had felt depressed in the week before the interview. To understand depression, it is crucial to grasp two fundamental concepts: power and status. According to Kemper (2007), power is the ability to coerce others to do what an actor wants them to do, even though they do not want to do it (Kemper 2007, p. 89). Status is related to the received benefits and rewards from the other/s in the relationship (Kemper 2007, p. 90). Emotion is the outcome of the interaction between the actors in terms of power and status, as Bericat (2014) explains; "An individual will, in general, be content and satisfied when he or she considers that his/her power and status are adequate, and will be discontented or dissatisfied when he or she feels his/her power and status to be insufficient or excessive" (Bericat 2014, p. 602). Depression can be the result

of a deficit in status and/or a lack of power. Both apply in the case of refugee workers, who are in a very low position of power and suffer daily from rejection or discrimination. This in turn negatively affects their perception of status. Syrian refugee workers can find themselves working 11–12 h daily under very harsh conditions, while at the same time, in many cases, not even being welcome in the neighborhood where they live. These feelings are captured in the words of Amal:

> "Our work creates problems between us and the Turks! My neighbor said because of you my son will lose his job. I said 'why because of us? What is our fault? You want to work and we want to work.'"
>
> Female, 38 years old, 4 years in Istanbul, tailor

The quote portrays tensions with local workers, evident in refugees being often blamed for job losses. Despite this, the speaker emphasizes the shared desire for employment. The narrative underscores the complex social dynamics and economic challenges facing Syrian refugees in Istanbul. Although depression can be influenced by persistent personal failures and frustration from lacking power resources, it is generally more closely linked to the absence of rewards associated with the relational dimension of status (Bericat 2014, p. 617).

The majority of our interlocutors (44 out of 62) did not feel that they had enjoyed life in the last week (before the interview). Indeed, the employment conditions of our participants do not leave any margin for enjoyment activities; they are deprived of time and money because of the long working hours and their low wages. As Reem explained:

> "If you look at Istanbul, you would say oh how beautiful it is! That is true if it possible to go out and see it! This is not our case!"
>
> Female, 19 years old, 8 years in Istanbul, runner/errand person

However, to mitigate the harsh conditions, our interlocutors sought moments to be with family and friends, or to join group activities that could help establish better relations with others in Istanbul. Indeed, when we asked "When have you felt that you were enjoying life", they usually mentioned these moments. For example, weekly encounters playing football was one of the most common strategies employed by many young male participants in this research for managing emotions to feel better despite pressure at work. However, even this activity comes with certain obstacles, due to the perception of misunderstandings or rejection, which can decrease their emotional energy. As Fadi explained:

> "Football is my hobby. I go to play, then they ask you if you have this in Syria. Ahh, we are from another planet! Many things, they will be surprised when they find out that we have it in Syria".
>
> Male, 20 years old, 7 years in Istanbul, ironing

In this section, participants expressed a lack of enjoyment due to demanding work conditions, finding solace in family and social connections. Group activities like football serve as coping mechanisms, despite facing obstacles like alienation. Their pursuit of enjoyment amidst adversity reflects resilience in navigating life in Istanbul.

5.2. The Personal (Self) and the Power Dimensions: Powerless and Positive with Oneself

Despite the lack of time and money our participants had to "enjoy" leisure time in Istanbul, most of them said that they felt proud and positive about themselves, and were optimistic about their future. Based on quantitative data extracted from survey questionnaires, Bericat and Acosta (2020, 2021) similarly compared the self-dimension between Uruguayan workers in different employment conditions, between workers and the rest of the population, and between different countries. They affirm that "those who face a greater degree of uncertainty, are also those who have more strength" (Bericat and

Acosta 2020, p. 8). However, this statement should not be interpreted as suggesting that strength renders uncertainty harmless. Rather, it underscores the complex coexistence of emotional resilience and structural vulnerability. Work enhances self-esteem, which concerns all qualities that help to maintain self-respect such as role preservation, continuity of self, legacy, and so on (Viinamäki et al. 1993). These terms are further clarified in the following lines based on our data.

As noted above, the main occupation of most individuals we engaged with was in the textile industry in their home country. This provides them with a kind of continuity in their professional trajectory. Working in a new city far from their lost home, being able to save their family, or helping family members after a harsh migration process are the sources of pride most often repeated in the interviews. Furthermore, as forced migrants who left their homes in the context of popular uprisings. They made every effort to stay in their homes and avoid leaving, but ultimately, they had no choice but to depart. This outcome was largely driven by regional and international power interests, which left them with no viable options to remain.

> "Of course, I am proud of myself, being from Syria is itself a source of pride, because a person who came from Syria and saw all of this means a lot! Oh what we lived through! It was incredible! and we are still standing on our two feet, and we can continue and fight!"
>
> Female, 55 years old, 6 years in Istanbul, cleaning garments (removing extra threads)

The loss of control over life experienced by our interlocutors is clearly reflected in the emotional states of stress and relaxation. Stress, as the analysis suggests, arises from the inability to manage situations that individuals are compelled to engage with due to external pressures. In this context, worry is provoked by the constant expectation of potential adverse events. Refugee workers find themselves living under constant uncertainty—facing economic, legal, and political threats. As highlighted in the analysis, the economic policies that increase workers' dependence on low-wage, unstable jobs in the textile sector have further compounded the notion of 'hyper-precarity.' The interviews revealed that this vulnerability does not only threaten their material well-being but also imposes a significant psychological strain. This continuous sense of instability imposes a heavy emotional burden. A key question arises: how can they regain a sense of control over their lives? For many of them, migration, in its various forms, appears to be the only viable solution, despite its inherent uncertainties. The following section delves deeper into the potential implications of this perception of migration.

6. Consequences for Life Plans: Migration as Ongoing Hope in the Pursuit of Stability and Control over the Future

The majority of our interlocutors indicated that if they have the chance to leave Turkey, they will. Given these circumstances, most are likely to seek migration to Europe in search of more stable opportunities. However, the fall of the Syrian regime on 8 December 2024, may lead many to consider returning to Syria, even though the conditions there are still not suitable for return due to the loss of their homes and the deteriorating economic and service conditions, which will take a long time to improve. A few expressed their willingness to continue in the same profession, but only under better conditions. Almost nobody wanted to continue at their current place of work; in their view, they have fled one form of hell (war and persecution) only to land in another (hyper-precarity without rights). As Zainab explained:

> "This dream is following me; to leave Turkey. I no longer have any other dreams for myself. I mean, because of my age. Of course, I have dreams for my son, I want to support him".
>
> Female, 41 years old, 3 years in Istanbul, garment decorating worker

This quote illustrates the desire for migration as a persistent aspiration. The refugees' loss of control over their lives has deprived them of their capacity to make plans for the future as can been seen in Nilsen (1999, p. 178) when distinguishing between dreams, hopes, and plans. The first (dream) is related to a timeless and spaceless realm. Here, there is no commitment from the person having this dream. Hope enters the realm of the possible, though it still contains aspects of uncertainty that do not permit converting it into plans. When our interlocutors expressed their aspiration to migrate outside of Turkey, they did so always with an expression such as "if I get the chance" or "if I can". These conditional sentences reflect the state of "uncertainty" or what we referred to at the beginning of this article as ambiguity. It is evident that our interlocutors lack concrete long-term plans for the future; instead, they express aspirations that remain unformed due to the uncertainty and constraints they face. This situation is understandable considering the numerous obstacles restricting their movement, both across borders and within Turkey, as well as the economic challenges of covering travel costs. However, despite these limitations, they do formulate specific plans regarding events they believe they can control, such as getting married, changing jobs, or supporting their families. These plans reflect a pragmatic approach to their immediate circumstances, allowing them to maintain some agency in their lives amidst broader uncertainties. Professional plans were usually outside of their area of control. Therefore, the only way to gain control is to migrate (Europe being the primary destination).

In summary, this research found a predominance of depression resulting from a deficit in status and power, as well as a feeling of loss of control over life.[3] Nevertheless, refugee workers remained proud and positive about themselves. Those factors related to situation, interaction, and control over the elements of their everyday life tended to be very negative, while the personal elements related to their self-esteem tended to be very positive. This could explain why most of them found migrating outside of Turkey to be a solution; they believe that if they had the opportunity to migrate, they would be able to start a new and better life. They see migration as ongoing hope for liberation from the institutional violence that they suffer in Turkey.

7. Conclusions

The structure of the textile industry in Istanbul is grounded in subcontracting and the migration regime that holds refugees in positions of extreme precarity and ambiguity, enabling factories to keep production costs low by exploiting their workers. Contemporary consumption trends contribute to making these workers' conditions even worse. These conditions directly invoke the concept of 'hyper-precarity', where refugee workers are exposed to levels of exploitation and psychological stress not commonly found in most formal labor markets, further limiting their economic opportunities and contributing to their social isolation. With the rise in fast fashion, more control over the workers is required to produce not only quickly but also with more precision. This need for control generates a situation of constant stress throughout the entire production process due to the harsh system of punishment employed in the workplace. Large factories tend to respect the rights of workers more because they work with big companies that are concerned about their public image. They therefore generally close their doors to refugees because of the complicated process of gaining work permits for them. Yet they rely on a "reserve army" of workers in small factories that reduce the cost of production through subcontracting

when necessary. All of this has a corrosive effect on working conditions in the smaller more unregulated factories and generates invisible labor within the textile industry that merits urgent attention.

In conclusion, we emphasize the dire circumstances faced by refugee workers, who encounter systematic marginalization within the labor market, alongside discrimination and exclusion. These findings highlight the prevalence of hyper-precarity and institutional violence, as refugees navigate through a labor market that systematically exploits them, further entrenched by structural policies that sustain their marginalized position. Institutional violence is particularly evident in the complex policies that prevent refugees from obtaining official work permits, forcing them into illegal work or small factories. These policies, although often invisible, contribute to maintaining the conditions that lead to the exploitation of these workers. Particularly within Istanbul's garment factories, refugees endure unequal treatment and precarious conditions, exacerbated by societal tensions and prejudices. However, despite these formidable challenges, refugee communities exhibit remarkable resilience by seeking flexibility within alternative work arrangements such as smaller workshops, day labor, or entrepreneurial endeavors. Despite facing institutionalized exclusion, these communities' resilience emphasizes the complexity of navigating such structural violence and points to the urgent need for a deeper engagement with the sociopolitical dimensions of their lived experiences. In navigating these constrained circumstances, refugees demonstrate their resourcefulness. Nevertheless, it remains crucial to acknowledge the narrow margin within which they operate. Thus, while the pursuit of flexibility within these alternative work settings emerges as a site for greater agency, it also underscores the profound challenges faced by refugee communities.

This article therefore underscores the urgency of policy interventions aimed at addressing systemic marginalization and promoting inclusive labor practices. In particular, these interventions must focus not only on immediate legal protection and economic stability but also on challenging the structural inequalities that perpetuate refugee workers' precariousness and social invisibility. Furthermore, this raises broader questions about the intersection of migration, labor markets, and social equity, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to support the livelihoods and well-being of refugee populations. To achieve this, a more integrated framework could involve fostering partnerships between governments, international organizations, and local communities to ensure access to education, legal protection, and sustainable employment opportunities for refugees.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, B.M.; methodology, B.M.; investigation, B.M.; writing—original draft preparation, B.M.; writing—review and editing, B.M. and R.M.S.-M.; supervision, R.M.S.-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This paper is based on research funded by the European Union's Horizon, 2020 research and innovation program, Marie Sklodowska-Curie Actions, under Grant 841144 (Project FMGESI).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee for Social Sciences at Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey (protocol code 2020.329.IRB3.117, on 3 September 2020), and by the Institutional Review Board (Comisión de Ética en Investigación) of the University of Granada, Granada, Spain (protocol code 1134/CEIH/2020, on 21 May 2021).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy considerations. Pseudonyms were used, and all potentially identifying information has been removed. Only selected anonymized quotations are included in the article to support the analysis.

Acknowledgments: This article is the result of research conducted as part of a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship, integrated into the CON&PRO research line at the University of Granada (UGR), in collaboration with the research group Social Problems in Andalusia and the Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc) in Istanbul. The authors would like to express their gratitude to Maissam Nimer, Senay Özden, Moawia Shannan, and Ola Barqawi for their invaluable support in facilitating the fieldwork in Istanbul. Special thanks are also extended to Ahmet İçduygu, Ayşen Üstübici, Souad Osseiran, and Birce Altıok at MiReKoc for their commitment and collaborative spirit, which were essential to the success of this research. Additionally, the authors sincerely thank Javier Valls Prieto from the University of Granada for his valuable assistance during the ethical assessment process. Furthermore, we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the 62 participants of this study, without whom this research would not have been possible. Their willingness to share their experiences and insights is deeply appreciated and forms the foundation of this work.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

[1] Most small workshops have to stop production from time to time in-between orders.
[2] The value of the Turkish lira during the field work was around 0.10 euro.
[3] This differs from pre-migration trauma, often seen by psychologists as a major cause of refugees' psychological issues; these reactions and emotions are tied to current events.

References

Alkay, Elif, and Geoffrey J. D. Hewings. 2012. The determinants of agglomeration for the manufacturing sector in the Istanbul metropolitan area. *The Annals of Regional Science* 48: 225–45. [CrossRef]

Anadolu Agency. 2014. Istanbul Boosts National Exports: Turkish Exporters' Assembly. *Hurriyetdailynews*. July 5. Available online: https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbul-boosts-national-exports-turkish-exporters-assembly-68720 (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Andersson, Johanna, Achim Berg, Saskia Hedrich, Patricio Ibanez, Jonatan Janmark, and Karl-Hendrik Magnus. 2018. *Is Apparel Manufacturing Coming Home?* New York: McKinsey Apparel, Fashion & Luxury Group. Available online: https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/is-apparel-manufacturing-coming-home (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Atal, Mojib Rahman. 2024. *Institutional Violence Against Afghan Refugees*. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Bayraktar, Nisanur, and Ayberk Şeker. 2022. *The Power of Turkey in Textile Export and the Dimension of Comptetition with China*. Istanbul: PressAcademia Procedia (PAP), vol. 15, pp. 54–58.

Bericat, Eduardo. 2014. The Socioemotional Well-Being Index (SEWBI): Theoretical Framework and Empirical Operationalisation. *Social Indicators Research* 119: 599–626. [CrossRef]

Bericat, Eduardo, and Ma Julia Acosta. 2020. *El Impacto del COVID-19 en el Bienestar Emocional de los Trabajadores en Uruguay*. Montevideo: Equipos Consultores, pp. 2–4.

Bericat, Eduardo, and Ma Julia Acosta. 2021. La paradoja latinoamericana de la felicidad. Consideraciones teórico-metodológicas. *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 83: 709–43.

Bick, Rachel, Erika Halsey, and Christine C. Ekenga. 2018. The Global Environmental Injustice of Fast Fashion. *Environmental Health* 17: 92. [CrossRef]

Birch, Eugenie. 2019. Informality as a way of life. In *Workshop of the Penn IUR Series on Urban Informality*. Philadelphia: Institute for Urban Research, University of Pennsylvania, vol. 24, pp. 1–5.

Countryeconomy. 2022. Türkiye Turkey National Minimum Wage—NMW. Available online: https://countryeconomy.com/national-minimum-wage/turkey (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Çetin, Reha Atakan. 2020. Externalization of the European Union Migration Regime: The Case of Turkey. *New Political Science* 42: 538–57. [CrossRef]

De Neve, Geert. 2014. Fordism, flexible specialization and CSR: How Indian garment workers critique neoliberal labour regimes. *Ethnography* 15: 184–207. [CrossRef]

Dedeoğlu, Saniye. 2021. Women's Home-based Work in Istanbul's Garment Industry: Gender Inequalities and Industrial Work. In *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 96–114.

Duman, Anil, and Alper Duman. 2021. The More the Gloomier: Development of Informal Employment and Its Effect on Wages in Turkey. Available online: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3863614 (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Fehr, Irina, and Conny Rijken. 2022. Child Labor Among Syrian Refugees in Turkey. *Frontiers* 4: 861524. [CrossRef]

Galtung, Johan. 1969. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6: 167–91. [CrossRef]
Genç, Firat, Gerda Heck, and Sabine Hess. 2018. The Multilayered Migration Regime in Turkey: Contested Regionalization, Deceleration and Legal Precarization. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 34: 489–508. [CrossRef]
Goethals, Samentha, and Emre Korkmaz. 2018. *What's Changed for Syrian Refugees in Turkish Garment Supply Chains?: A Survey & Analysis of Company Action to Address Exploitation & Abuse*. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. Available online: https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/Syrian_Refugess_in_Turkey_Public2.pdf (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Guven, Baris. 2017. Understanding Urban Change in Istanbul: From the Capital City to the City of Capital. Available online: https://www.academia.edu/25325816/Understanding_Urban_Change_in_Istanbul_From_the_Capital_City_to_the_City_of_Capital (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Hagemann, Anke. 2015. From flagship store to factory: Tracing the spaces of transnational clothing production in Istanbul. *Articulo-Journal of Urban Research* 12: 2889. [CrossRef]
Hagemann, Anke, and Elke Beyer. 2020. Globalizing urban research, grounding global production networks. Transnational clothing production and the built environment. *Journal of Urban Research* 21: 4622. [CrossRef]
Ilcan, Suzan, Kim Rygiel, and Feyzi Baban. 2018. The ambiguous architecture of precarity: Temporary protection, everyday living and migrant journeys of Syrian refugees. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies* 4: 51–70. [CrossRef]
INGEV. 2019. *Needs Assessment for Syrian SMES: Research on Knowledge and Barriers Among Syrian Entrepreneurs in Turkey*. Toplumsal Araştırmalar Merkezi. Available online: https://ingev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Needs-Assessment-for-Syrian-SMEs.pdf (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Issari, Philia, Anna Christopoulou, and Athina Galika. 2021. Life stories of Syrian refugees: A qualitative study. *Psychology* 12: 1542–60. [CrossRef]
Karabag, Solmaz Filiz, Marco Chi Keung Lau, and Farrukh Suvankulov. 2012. Determinants of Firm Competitiveness: Case of the Turkish Textile and Apparel Industry. *The Journal of The Textile Institute* 105: 1–11. [CrossRef]
Kemper, Theodore D. 2007. Power and Status and the Power-Status Theory of Emotions. In *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*. Edited by Jan E. Stets and Jonathan H. Turner. New York: Springer.
Knappert, Lena, Angela Kornau, and Meltem Figengül. 2018. Refugees' exclusion at work and the intersection with gender: Insights from the Turkish-Syrian border. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 105: 62–82. [CrossRef]
Korkmaz, Emre Eren. 2017. How Do Syrian Refugee Workers Challenge Supply Chain Management in the Turkish Garment Industry? The IMI Working Papers Series. *IMI Working Paper Series* 133: 1–18.
Mencutek, Zeynep S. 2022. The Institutionalization of "Voluntary" Returns in Turkey. *Migration and Society* 5: 43–58. [CrossRef]
Metgud, D., Subhash Khatri, M. Mokashi, and P. Saha. 2008. An ergonomic study of women workers in a woolen textile factory for identification of health-related problems. *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 12: 14–19. [CrossRef]
Ministry of Trade—Republic of Turkey. 2024. Clothing Industry. Available online: https://www.trade.gov.tr/data/5b8fd6d913b8761f041feee0/Clothing%202022.pdf (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Nawyn, Stephanie J. 2016. Migration in the Global South: Exploring New Theoretical Territory. *International Journal of Sociology* 46: 81–84. [CrossRef]
Nilsen, Ann. 1999. Where is the future? Time and space as categories in analyses of young people's images of the future. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 12: 175–94. [CrossRef]
Nimer, Maissam, and Susan Beth Rottmann. 2021. Migration Regime and "Language Part of Work": Experiences of Syrian Refugees as Surplus Population in the Turkish Labor Market. *Critical Sociology* 47: 763–76. [CrossRef]
Nimer, Maissam, and Susan Beth Rottmann. 2022. Logistification and hyper-precarity at the intersection of migration and pandemic governance: Refugees in the Turkish labour market. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 35: 122–38. [CrossRef]
OECD. 2008. *OECD Territorial Reviews: Istanbul, Turkey 2008*. Paris: OECD.
Oral, Elif. 2019. Sustainability Challenges of Fast Fashion: Environmental and Social Impacts of Cotton Growing and the Ready-Made Garment Industry in Turkey. *Yuridika* 34: 443–66. [CrossRef]
Oruc, Mertkan, and Emir Yildirim. 2025. *Istanbul Boasts 15.7M Population, More Populous Than 131 Countries*. Ankara: Anadolu Agency. Available online: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/istanbul-boasts-157m-population-more-populous-than-131-countries/3475050 (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Plank, Leonhard, Arianna Rossi, and Cornelia Staritz. 2014. What does 'fast fashion'mean for workers? Apparel production in Morocco and Romania. In *Towards Better Work: Understanding Labour in Apparel Global Value Chains*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 127–47.
Refugees Association. 2022. Number of Syrians in Turkey April 2022. Available online: https://multeciler.org.tr/eng/number-of-syrians-in-turkey/ (accessed on 14 May 2025).
Requena, Antonio Trinidad, Rosa M. Soriano-Miras, Francisco Barros Rodríguez, Kathryn Kopinak, and Jenna Hennebry. 2015. La economía global localizada en el norte de Marruecos. *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas (REIS)* 152: 121–40.

Requena, Antonio Trinidad, Rosa María Soriano-Miras, and María Calvo Alba. 2021. Water resources and textile maquilas in Tehuacán. *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 37: 676–94. [CrossRef]

Sennett, Richard. 2009. *El artesano*. Barcelona: Anagrama.

Singh, N. 2016. Safety and health issues in workers in clothing and textile industries. *International Journal of Home Science* 2: 38–40.

Sirkeci, Ibrahim. 2017. Turkey's refugees, Syrians and refugees from Turkey: A country of insecurity. *Migration Letters* 14: 127–44. [CrossRef]

Taplin, Ian M. 2014. Who is to blame? A re-examination of fast fashion after the 2013 factory disaster in Bangladesh. *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 10: 72–83. [CrossRef]

Textiles Intelligence. 2021. *Prospects for the Textile and Clothing Industry in Turkey, 2021*. Research and Markets. Available online: https://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/5395382/prospects-for-the-textile-and-clothing-industry (accessed on 14 May 2025).

United State Department of Agriculture. 2024. Exporter Guide, Turkiye—2023. Available online: https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Exporter%20Guide%20Annual_Ankara_Turkiye_TU2024-0025.pdf (accessed on 14 May 2025).

Ünlütürk Ulutaş, Çağla. 2016. Syrian migrants in turkish labour market. *Journal of Life Economics* 3: 163–76. [CrossRef]

Van Hear, Nicholas, Veronique Barbelet, Christina Bennett, and Helma Lutz. 2018. Refugia Roundtable: Imagining Refugia: Thinking Outside the Current Refugee Regime. *Migration and Society* 1: 175–94. [CrossRef]

van Leeuwen, Kees, and Rosa Sjerps. 2016. Istanbul: The challenges of integrated water resources management in Europa's megacity. *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 18: 1–17. [CrossRef]

Viinamäki, Heimo, Kaj Koskela, Leo Niskanen, Robert Arnkill, and Jari Tikkanen. 1993. Unemployment and mental wellbeing: A factory closure study in Finland. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 88: 429–33. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Yalçın, Sezen. 2016. Syrian Child Workers in Turkey. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. December 20. Available online: http://www.transatlanticpolicy.com/article/831/syrian-child-workers-in-turkey (accessed on 8 July 2022).

Yılmaz, Aysegül Kayaoğlu. 2020. Labour market impact of Syrian refugees in Turkey: The view of employers in informal textile sector in Istanbul. *Migration Letters* 17: 583–95.