

Child Labour and the Harvesting of Hazelnuts in Turkey ***Report of a fact finding mission to Turkey*** ***5th - 9th September 2011***

HAZELNUTS REGION

They are proud of their hazelnuts. At the Black Sea coast of Turkey, the hazelnuts cannot be ignored. You do not only see many plantations and orchards while driving through the region, but also simply on the streets of Ordu or other cities, parking spaces and strips along the road have made room for drying the picked nuts. An older woman or a young child peel the hazelnuts and shake the batch of hazelnuts once again. At several locations in the city, there are offices and warehouses of the buyers. You can sell your harvest per bag over there. ^{1[1]}

The hazelnut is the symbol of the city of Ordu, which can also be seen in the roadside barrier of the road along the coast, where the hazelnuts are forged in the iron fence. What else with more than 200.000 owners of hazelnut orchards in this region. For most of these owners, about 80%, cultivating hazelnuts is not a main activity; it is an extra income. For the remaining 20%, the hazelnut industry is a fulltime job. Together they represent 75% of the hazelnut supply in the world.

The most important union of hazelnut growers in the region is *Findik Üreticileri Sendikası*, affiliated with the rural farmer's organization *Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*.

This confederation is in turn affiliated with the international farmer's organization *Via Campesina*. Point of contact of this union and federation, Kutsi Yaşar, is a reliable and involved informant on the hazelnuts situation in the region by the Black Sea. He tells us that till over 30 years ago, only local labour was used during the harvest of hazelnuts. Mutual support was offered for bringing in the harvests. Meanwhile, this situation has completely changed.

In the eighties and nineties of the 20th century, the Turkish army thought that the Southeast region had to be cleared from, according to their opinion, revolting Kurdish rebels. After establishment of the PKK, they seemed to have organized themselves in a tighter way. Over 4000 villages were destroyed and depopulated by the Turkish army during that battle. Without any further livelihoods, the population, mainly from Kurdish origin, fled to the cities in the region or cities further away,

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If the daily price does not suit, a better price can be waited for. Well dried hazelnuts preserve a good flavour quality for surely one year.

even till Istanbul. This resulted in a migration of surely 800.000 people. Without livelihoods, these refugee families presented themselves as migrant workers for the harvest. Partially in the region itself, but at times of low workload, also further away, towards the Black Sea.

So most of the labour is now performed by temporary seasonal workers, mainly Kurdish people from the southern part of the country.

HARVEST WORK

Most of the migrant families cross the whole of Turkey looking for an income and are contributing to the harvest of several seasonal products such as tomatoes, tobacco, apricots, pistachio nuts and hazelnuts. They stay at the same place for about one month on average and move on afterwards.

A small part of these migrant workers remains connected to the cultivation for a longer period. In the cotton sector in the south, it is not unusual that they account for almost the whole cultivation, during 7 to 8 months. In return for their proper care, they receive 30% of the harvest in kind.

Out of the profit, they still have to pay for the support of extra cotton pickers, so very often not much is left. Near Şanlıurfa, close to the Syrian border, beginning attention is now being paid to better housing for these families at the production fields. The government started building semi-permanent houses for the workers over there.

The hazelnuts are growing along the Black Sea Coast, in the provinces of Ordu and Giresun. Migrants can be busy with the harvest for about 4-6 weeks over there. First at the coast, then 20 to 30 kilometres further on in the mountains, since the hazelnuts are maturing a bit later at higher (colder) located orchards compared to lower, warmer located orchards. 30% of the migrant families are living at the farmer's place and 70% are staying at encampments. The employment is not formally arranged. Sometimes steady contacts arise between the farmers and the families, whereby these families contribute to the harvest with the same farmer for consecutive years. They often stay on the farmer's yard. But for most of them, the employment takes place through intermediaries, the subcontractors.

SUBCONTRACTORS

During winter, there is often already contact between the landowners and the subcontractors. We learned this from our interlocutors, but it can also be read in the thesis concerning seasonal workers by Deniz Pelek. ^[2] The landowner indicates how many people he needs for picking the hazelnuts. The intermediary is searching for the people, regularly within his own family or social network. He also sometimes supplies loans to these people, since most of the workers do not dispose of any other income during the winter months. That way, the workers are forced to actually work for the subcontractor. The subcontractor organizes that the required number of people starts to work for the different landowners on time. Besides, he mediates in case of possible problems.

There is no direct contact between the workers and the landowner. Consultation with the landowner about wage, stay and working conditions is being done by the subcontractors.

[2]

Deniz Pelek, Seasonal Migrant Workers in Agriculture: The cases of Ordu and Polatli, Thesis for Bogazici University, 2010.

At the end of the season, the landowners pay the agreed amount to the subcontractor. He pays the workers after detaining 8 to 10% as a commission fee for himself and the loan is naturally being settled with interest. An intermediary is placing dozens and sometimes hundreds of employees per season. The intermediaries are not registered anywhere and do not have to pay taxes for their incomes. Likewise, no monitoring is taking place to see whether they are sticking to the legislation or international labour standards.

Prior to the harvest season, a commission determines the wages. This commission consists of different government representatives and representatives of the hazelnut industry. ^[3]

There is however no check on the wages which are paid. In practice, the workers from the own region earn about 45 TL (Turkish Lira, +/- 18 euro) for 8 working hours during the harvest period. Contracted migrants, such as Georgians, receive 38 TL a day and Kurdish seasonal migrants get 28 to 30 TL a day. An important difference is that not only Kurdish people are considerably paid less, but have to work about 11 hours a day for this, the children too, who often get paid less than adults. ^[4]

When a meal is provided, 3 TL is deducted from the wage. In practice there are differences in the amounts paid by the landowners. Payment arrangements are, as said, made with the subcontractors and not with the worker himself.

CHILD LABOUR

Most farmers wait to harvest until the hazelnuts are mature and fall on the ground.

So harvesting is a matter of picking. Another procedure is pulling the nuts from the branches.

The branches are pliable, so by means of good cooperation, the children can also considerably contribute to this. The farmer, or one of his workers, checks the trees once again with a knife-on-stick to cut off the remaining bunches of hazelnuts. The work is literally childishly simple, just why children are wanted by the clients of the subcontractors. They pick handy and are docile.

Children are by consequence often more productive than adults.

Several workers indicated that their children must cooperate, because otherwise, they would not have enough food. The wages are so low that they are not sufficient to maintain a family. Moreover, they have to earn their income for a whole year during the different agricultural harvests. They often do not dispose of other incomes. Through this, these workers feel 'forced' to let their children cooperate and to keep them off school for a longer period.

At a farm we visited, a 14 year old boy completely cooperated. Girls of 15 and 18 years old, whom we extensively spoke to there, stated that they had been working harvesting at this farm for many years already. In reply to different questions, it was repeatedly confirmed that children at the age of 12 - 16 years, are participating in the harvest work usually. While visiting encampments during daytime, children between 10 - 18 years old, always seemed to be missing. They were at work.

[3]

Ibid.

[4]

TL 1 = € 0, 40



Subcontractors confirm that children, as part of a family commitment, are highly demanded by the farmers. We were told that arrangements are made, whereby it is agreed upon with the subcontractor that, per 6 workers he supplies, there should be 2 children. Monitoring by the labour inspection board seems out of the question. At the beginning of the season, the government however emphasizes that children under the age of 16 cannot execute labour, but active supervision of this legislation does not take place.

Not only the older, cooperating children are having a hard time. The children up to the age of 10 are travelling together with their parents and are staying at the encampments during the period of the seasonal labour. These children are therefore not going to school also. The situation in the camps is often bad and there are little recreational possibilities for the children. Some mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers are keeping on eye on them. The older girls (9-11) are assisting in taking care of their younger brothers and sisters and they help to cook.

Teachers of the Turkish teachers' union *Eğitim Sen* in Adiyaman declared that at their schools, hundreds of children at school age, do not attend school during surely 3 months, sometimes up to 6 months, of the school year and by consequence, they experience arrears. These arrears cannot be caught up, not even when another school is being visited in the working region, because of the difference in methodology and lesson systems..

Moreover, the families are often not staying at the same place for more than one month. This makes it difficult to run in at local schools.



A trade union for farm workers does not exist in Turkey. We did not hear about an interest organization for migrant workers. There was an association of subcontractors (*Mevsimlik Tarım İşçileri*) claiming to be defending the interests of the workers. The workers themselves were however not represented in this association. We got the feeling that the subcontractors did above all defend their own interests, which are, rather conflicting with the interests of the workers. The workers are kept totally dependent of the subcontractors and are forced to cede 8 to 10% of their already low wage to the subcontractor.

Within the established trade union structure knowledge hardly exists of, let alone involvement with the seasonal migrants and the related child labour.

Only one progressive trade union for the petrochemical industry in the southern province of Adiyaman (*Petrol İş*), feels responsible to play a role in the issue of child labour in the migrant families.

TURKISH GOVERNMENT

The messages in Western Europe on the bad living and housing conditions of the migrant workers in Turkey surely had results. The Turkish Government is aware of the problem and also acknowledged it. The government composed a plan in order to improve the situation in the camps. At several locations, they have placed fences in order to create a more sheltered camping spot and they also put money in some facilities. Now there are taps with clean drinking water, sanitary facilities and recreation spaces. However, at the places we visited, the water supply for the toilets and showers did not function. Moreover, the number is not sufficient for the large amount of workers who are staying at the encampments. Nevertheless, these sheltered facilities are being respected by the occupants. Dialogues with (possible) occupants about the equipment and the maintenance of the encampments seems to be totally lacking. The occupants feel hardly responsible for the facilities offered to them. They did not have their say in it. There are no activities focused on children.



At national level, the all-important central authority in Turkey, a state commission (METIB) has been set up in order to investigate the issue of child labour in seasonal migration.

The regional supervising bodies for seasonal work, the SMFW's, have set up policies which have to be elaborated in the regions. But even a correct statistic view of the volume of the internal migration in Turkey is lacking. The responsible authority hereto, the ISCWR, does not succeed in composing a reliable overview.

At longer term, only a strong economic development of the southern regions offers a real solution for the Kurdish seasonal workers. In the province of Şanlıurfa, at the border with Syria, \$22 million were invested in a hydroelectricity dam project, which has to bring up a whole region to (agricultural) development with matching irrigation systems. It is expected that more labour will then be reserved for the inhabitants of the region and that less families will see themselves forced to look for seasonal work in other Turkish regions.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is no doubt that child labour is a common practice while harvesting of (among others) hazelnuts. This causes a considerable amount of non-attendance at school.

Not only by the children who are working, but also by the younger children who are travelling with their parents and by consequence can also not attend school.

2. The wages, especially of the Kurdish seasonal workers, are low and contribute to the continuation of child labour. The difference in remuneration, employment and working conditions between the different population groups is contrary to the non-discrimination principle, one of the fundamental labour rights of the ILO.

3. The Turkish Government acknowledged the child labour issue, but the deployment of the government currently limits itself to providing some facilities in de camps. There was no sign of actual monitoring or combating child labour by the public authorities.

4. The workers are highly depending on the subcontractors to whom they have to cede 8 to 10% of their income. These subcontractors are not registered and are not supervised by the government, which can lead to abuse such as child labour, low wages and bad working conditions.

5. Within the established trade unions, attention hardly exists for the issue of child labour in the seasonal migration. The education association *Eğitim Sen* and the union of petrochemical workers *Petrol Is* in the region are positive exceptions. Other organizations which are committing themselves to the seasonal migrants are not noticeably present, if there are any.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is necessary to disclose the situation in Turkey of the migrant workers and their children, working and travelling with them, broader internationally.

2. Besides organizing better accommodations, the Turkish government should also take more responsibility to fulfil the right to education of the children and to protect them from labour.

This can be realized through structural improvements, such as: 1) provide sufficient and accessible educational facilities; 2) solid labour inspection on the field and at the orchards; 3) alignment of the wages and working conditions for local people and seasonal migrants; 4) regulation and monitoring of the subcontractors; and 5) reinforce the economic position of the migrants in the regions they are coming from.

3. Companies (both Turkish and international ones) which are buying and processing the hazelnuts, should claim that, in the contracts with their providers, child labour should be banished from all their activities, as well as from those of their suppliers and that the rights of the employees and the workers are being respected.

Companies should not only supervise their supply chains to see to it that they live up to these engagements, but they do also have to take care of suitable measures to enable a structural solution and communicate in a transparent way to all stakeholders including consumers (supply chain responsibility).

4. Together with the teachers' union *Eğitim Sen*, an action plan could be elaborated in order to fight non-attendance at school and child labour. Thereby, there could be cooperation with the Dutch and German teachers' unions and committed NGO's in Turkey.

5. It has to be checked whether there are possibilities for self-organization of migrant workers. Theretofore, it would be possible to cooperate with the (progressive) farmers' organization *Çiftçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu* and with *Petrol İş*.

6. Consumers and trade unions in consumer countries of the hazelnuts have to address the buying and processing companies on their chain responsibility.

7. In order to come to a structural improvement of the situation of seasonal workers and in order to obtain an actual abolishment of child labour, it is necessary that the different involved parties such as companies, national and local authorities, trade unions, schools, local organizations and the workers in the chains themselves, start a dialogue with each other and that they cooperate where possible. Each player has its own role and responsibilities and should take the lead to do so.

MEMBERS OF THE DELEGATION

The delegation of FNV Bondgenoten consisted of trade union official Çelil Çoban and the shop stewards Mail Urker and Dick de Graaf. Leonie Blokhuis from the campaign 'Stop Child Labour-School is the best workplace' joined the delegation. The delegation was repeatedly affected by the unexpected, but sincere hospitality from the Turkish colleagues whom they met during the trip.

Dick De Graaf, FNV Bondgenoten

Leonie Blokhuis, Stop Kinderarbeid