

THE PLACE OF SYRIAN REFUGEE WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES: THE CASE OF ANKARA

Suriyeli Mülteci Kadınların İşgücü Piyasasındaki Yeri Ve Deneyimleri: Ankara Örneği

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ÖZET

After the civil war that started in Syria, the first Syrian refugee influx occurred in Turkey in March 2011. At that time, there was an expectation that Syrians would return to their countries. Turkey, which adopted the open door policy to these flow. However, the intense flow of migration continues today. The Turkish economy has gained a new dimension with the prolonged war, the fact that most of the refugees live outside the camps, and informal employment. This study investigates the place of Syrian refugee women in the labor market and the problems they face, based on their experience in the labor market in Turkey. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Syrian women in Ankara province. The obtained data were coded and interpreted under themes. The situation of refugee women in the workplace, their wages, the problems they faced, the income of their education in the labor market and whether they were exposed to discrimination by the employer were evaluated. The result of the study indicates that Syrian women refugees are exposed to discrimination when compared to Turkish female workers with similar characteristics.

Keywords: Syrian women refugees, labor force, working conditions, Refugees in Turkey

ABSTRACT


Suriye'de başlayan iç savaşın ardından ilk olarak 2011 yılının Mart ayında Suriyeli sığınmacı akını gerçekleşmiştir. O dönemde Suriyelilerin ülkelerine geri döneceği beklentisi hâkimdi. Türkiye, gelen bu akına açık kapı politikasını benimsedi. Fakat yoğun göç akımı günümüzde de devam etmektedir. Savaşın uzun sürmesi, gelen sığınmacıların çoğunluğunun kampların dışında yaşaması, kayıt dışı istihdamla birlikte Türk ekonomisi yeni bir boyut kazanmıştır. Bu çalışmada Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mülteci kadınların işgücü piyasasındaki yeri ve işgücü piyasa deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak karşılaşılmış oldukları sorunlar araştırılmaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Ankara ilinde 10 Suriyeli kadın ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler kodlanıp temalar altında yorumlanmıştır. Mülteci kadınların işyerindeki durumu, ücretleri, aldıkları eğitimin işgücü piyasasındaki getirisi ve işveren tarafından ayrımcılığa maruz kalıp kalmadıkları değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonucu, Suriyeli kadın mültecilerin benzer özelliklerdeki Türk kadın çalışanlar ile kıyaslandıklarında ayrımcılığa maruz kaldıklarına işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli kadın mülteciler, işgücü, çalışma koşulları, Türkiye'deki mülteciler


1. INTRODUCTION

According to Betts (2017), forced migration has been an important feature for the 20th century and early 21st century. Many people have had to flee their homes due to political persecution, conflicts, natural or man-made disasters. According to World Bank data (2017), the immigrant population in the world has reached 3.3% of the total population. The civil war in Syria has caused one of the world's largest population movements and refugee movements, turning nearly four million people into refugees. With the prolongation of the process, the refugees started to have political, economic, social and security effects in the countries they migrated to. On 29.04.2011, 300-400 Syrian citizens, move towards Cilvegözü border gate in Hatay province has created the first mass population movements towards Turkey from Syria. During this population movement, necessary measures were taken; 252 Syrian citizens were taken in from the border and temporary accommodation and food needs were provided in a gym in Hatay (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). Asylum seekers who emigrated from Syria to Turkey are basically divided into three groups. The first group is the group of Syrians who have universal professions such as doctor and engineering and generally perform the same jobs by settling in metropolitan cities. The second group of refugees is the group of Syrians who are described as blue-collar, can use machinery and work as masters or foremen in their country. The last group, on the other hand, is the group that generally resides in camps and consents to work in any business sector for low wages (Kaya 2016: 4).

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Regarding UNHRC (2020) Most of the Syrian refugees are in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Table 1 demonstrate that 65,1% of the Syrian refugees, 3.627.961 Syrian refugees registered in Turkey.

Table 1. Total Registered Syrian Refugees by Country

Total Persons of Concern by Country of Asylum

JSON

Location name	Source	Data date	Population
Turkey	Government of Turkey	28 Oct 2020	65.1% 3,627,961
Lebanon	UNHCR	30 Sep 2020	15.8% 879,529
Jordan	UNHCR	4 Sep 2020	11.8% 659,673
Iraq	UNHCR	30 Sep 2020	4.4% 242,704
Egypt	UNHCR	30 Sep 2020	2.3% 130,085
Other (North Africa)	UNHCR	31 Jan 2020	0.6% 31,657

Source: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/12/10/2020>

As Table 2 shown the number of Syrians in Turkey registered under temporary protection over the previous month as of October 21, 2020 a total of 2 thousand 549 people was increased by 3 million 624 thousand 517 people. 1 million 694 thousand 242 of these people (46.7%) are children between the ages of 0-18. The total number of children and women aged 0-18 is 2 million 558 thousand 139 people. (70.5%).

Table 2. Demographic Data of Syrian refugees in Turkey

AGE RANGE	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
0-4	255 thousand 900	247 thousand 400	503 thousand 300
5-9	282 thousand 601	259 thousand 721	542 thousand 322
10-14	203 thousand 410	184 thousand 596	388 thousand 006
15-18	142 thousand 58	118 thousand 556	260 thousand 614
19-24	286 thousand 703	212 thousand 812	499 thousand 515
25-29	203 thousand 103	148 thousand 213	351 thousand 316
30-34	159 thousand 210	116 thousand 3	275 thousand 213
35-39	119 thousand 421	97 thousand 213	216 thousand 234
40-44	84 thousand 812	76 thousand 34	160 thousand 846
45-49	60 thousand 622	57 thousand 407	118 thousand 29
50-54	49 thousand 814	48 thousand 956	98 thousand 770
55-59	38 thousand 213	38 thousand 279	76 thousand 492
60-64	28 thousand 606	29 thousand 416	58 thousand 22
65-69	20 thousand 366	20 thousand 795	41 thousand 161
70-74	7 thousand 785	8 thousand 775	16 thousand 560
75 +	7 thousand 723	9 thousand 994	17 thousand 717
TOTAL	1.950.347	1.674.170	3.624.517

Source: <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>, 22/10/2020.

According to the age range table published by the Immigration Administration in Table 2, the ratio of women and children is 70.5%. The ratio of Syrian men to the total population is 53.8%, while the ratio of Syrian women is 46.2%. The number of Syrians under the age of 10 is 1 million 45 thousand 622 people (28.8%). According to the table, the number of Syrian men is 276,177 more than Syrian women. The biggest difference between the number of men and women is between the ages of 19-24 with 73 thousand 891 people. As the number of ages increases, this difference decreases. It is observed that the number of women in the age range above 55 is higher than men.

There are 760 thousand 129 people in the 15-24 age range defined as the young population. The ratio of the Syrian young population to the total number of Syrians is 20.9%. The date of December 31, 2019, according to data Turkstat announced that the number of 12 million 955 thousand 672 in Turkey's young population to the total population, 15.5% of this number.

According to the data of the Immigration Administration dated 21 October 2020, the 10 cities with the highest number of Syrians and the density of Syrians in these cities are shown in the table 3 below. While the city with the highest number of Syrians is Istanbul with 512 thousand 578 people. Kilis, with 76.08%, is the province with the highest concentration of Syrians compared to the local population.

Table 3. Number of Syrians by City

2020	Cities	Syrian Population	Comparison with province population
1	Istanbul	512 thousand 578	3,3 %
2	Gaziantep	450 thousand 553	21,7 %
3	Hatay	434 thousand 301	26,6 %
4	Şanlıurfa	419 thousand 803	20,2 %
5	Adana	250 thousand 3	11,1 %
6	Mersin	217 thousand 952	11,8 %
7	Bursa	177 thousand 578	5,8 %
8	İzmir	147 thousand 101	3,3 %
9	Konya	116 thousand 921	5,2 %
10	Kilis	108 thousand 412	76 %

Source: <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>, 22/10/2020.

Commenting on the location of Syrian immigrants in the labor market in Turkey age, sex and geographical distribution will be missing only take into account demographic factors. It is known that education is a distinctive factor in the relationship between labor and capital in the labor market (Brunello, 2001; Bedir, 2002). A significant portion of the Syrian population consists of children and youth in Turkey. For this reason, education will determine the position of Syrians in the labor market now and in the coming years. Therefore, evaluation of educational opportunities for Syrian refugees in Turkey is of great importance. The province with the highest number of temporary education centers is Hatay with 120. Hatay is followed by 66 temporary education centers and Istanbul, 52 temporary education centers and Gaziantep and 43 temporary education centers followed by Şanlıurfa (Turkish Ministry of Interior Migration Management, 2017).

2. SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LABOR MARKETS AND INFORMAL ECONOMY

Syrians leaving their country after internal turmoil, resulted in the entry of all kinds of refugees, rich and poor, into Turkish territory. For males, the low schooling rate among refugees has manifested itself as a very strong labor market commitment, resulting in an employment rate of 66.1% for 15-year-old boys. This figure reveals an unprecedented situation when compared to other labor markets in the world (Pinedo-Caro, 2020). There may be three reasons for the high employment rate among young Syrians. The first is that many Syrian boys may find themselves wandering around because they do not attend school. Second, there is an urgent need to earn income, as evidenced by the fact that most Syrians earn below the minimum wage. The last, but by no means the least important reason is the cultural background where men are expected to work outside the home and women work at home (Pinedo-Caro, 2020).

It has been revealed that economic, social and cultural situations have some effects on the Syrian refugees being entrepreneurs. The integration of education and capitalist entrepreneur refugees into the labor market is a win-win situation for the entrepreneur and the country. Directing refugees to entrepreneurship will achieve socio-economic success at the macro level (Uygur, 2020).

On the other hand, the informal economy is the economic activities that cannot be calculated by income measurement methods because they are not included in the national accounting records and therefore are not included in the Gross National Product accounts. Therefore, these activities cannot be estimated by known statistical methods. These activities are mostly completely or partially unaware of the relevant authorities legally and illegally (Temel, 1994).

Factors of great importance in the creation of an unrecorded economy according to the development level of the countries, accounting systems, political and social structure, they can be listed as follows (Aydemir, 1995);

- ✓ Structure and development level of the economy
- ✓ Economic crises, inflation and instability
- ✓ Inequality of income distribution and poverty
- ✓ Distorted urbanization as a result of rapid population growth and migration

As the economic structure and development level decrease, the average size of the enterprises decreases and non-institutionalized SMEs are spreading. Here, the informal economy and unregistered employment are seen more in sectors formed by such companies. In the agricultural sector, the rate is increasing even more (Temel, 1994).

Heavy bureaucracy, excessive transaction costs, multi-heading in the state administration, insufficient determination of responsibilities and jurisdictions between institutions, state interventions in prices and wages are other reasons that support the informal economy and domination. Finally, the spread of flexible production and flexible employment models and the intensification of competition between firms also feed the informal economy (Sarica, 2006).

3. SYRIAN WOMEN REFUGEES: EMPLOYMENT TYPE AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The fact that individuals escaping from war conditions, terror, poverty or famine leave their homes behind and take shelter in the protection of another country at the point of maintaining their vital existence, and ultimately a new life construction, reveals that migration is a tragic process before and after. When examined in terms of Syrian women, it is seen that this tragedy is even more. Syrian women may have to face realities such as child marriage and pregnancy, exposure to sexual harassment and abuse, human trafficking, prostitution and sexual slavery, forced marriage as a second or third wife (Aygul & Kaba, 2019).

The situation of Syrian women is diametrically opposed to that of men; 71% of men work while only 11.2% of women in the 15-65 age range work. Although this break from the labor market is not as much as that of Turkish women. Figure 1 shows the age-specific percentage of women in each of the labour force statuses (employment, education, unemployment, housekeeping and other) among (a) Syrian refugees and (b) Turkish nationals (International Labor Organization Office in Turkey, 2020).

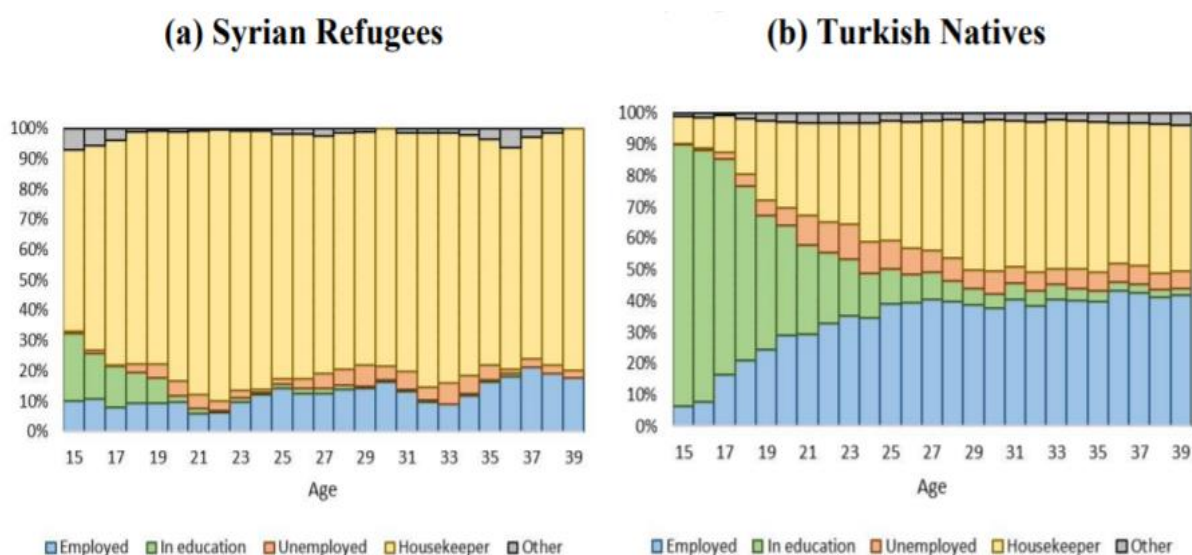


Figure 1. Labour Force Status by Age, Women
Source. (International Labor Organization Office in Turkey, 2020)

Syrian and Turkish women seem to have higher unemployment rates than men of the same nationality. It may be a correct explanation that women have less chance in the labor market than men. In addition, women's responsibility for housework etc. may reduce the number of jobs they can apply for. Behind the low female employment rates observed, current working conditions may not be too favorable either. The high rate of children in the refugee population may be an additional burden on Syrian women's efforts to participate in the labor force.

The reason why the Syrian refugees affect the Turkish labor market is the inability to take the necessary measures against the Syrian refugees or to take them late. Syrian refugees prefer to live outside of camps. Among the reasons for this situation, by logging off the record to be refugees from Turkey illegally, despite having lived in camps want to get away from the camp for various reasons, they do not prefer camp life that they have the necessary financial possibility, due to reach the physical occupancy capacity of the camps unable to find places in the camp, of kinship with the people. The reasons such as wanting to live close to their relatives due to their relationships can be listed (Koç et al 2015: 84). For this reason, Syrian refugees who do not want to live in the refugee camps or live among civilians for various reasons caused unemployment rates to increase due to their direct integration into the labor market.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data Collection

Determining the place of Syrian refugee women in Turkish labor market and their working conditions and to reveal women's experiences based on their labor market experiences are among the aims of this research. For the study purpose primary and secondary data are used. The primary data collected from Syrian women refugees who are working in different jobs in Ankara province. The secondary data collected from books, journals, documents, reports, web pages. The research has been completed between August-September 2020. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 Syrian women refugee regarding the research problem. Interviews were conducted with the help of an Arabic translator. None of refugee woman could speak enough Turkish or English to express herself. Snowball sampling technique was used in the research. Firstly a cleaning company in Ankara was reached. Syrian refugee women were interviewed there, and based on these individuals, Syrian women in different employment areas were reached. Since it is known that the people interviewed during the research process are sensitive, it is clearly stated that information will not be shared. The interviews were held at hours deemed appropriate for the participants. The anonymized data during the analysis were separated and interpreted according to coding units.

4.2. Research Questions

Research questions in the study:

- ✓ In which areas do Syrian women work and what are their working conditions?
- ✓ What problems do refugee women face in the labor market?

These research questions will be limited within the scope of Syrian Women Refugee labors in Ankara.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, basic research questions and results will be discussed.

Ankara is the 11th province with the highest population of refugees and asylum seekers. According to the datas,98,614 registered Syrian refugees are living currently (Refugees Association, 2020).

The demographic information and descriptive information of the sample group are given in table 4 below.

Table 4. Demographic and Descriptive Information of Syrian Women Refugees

	Age	Marital Status	Education Level	Profession in Syria	Profession in Turkey
X1	28	Married	High school	House wife	Cleaning
X2	23	Married	Secondary school	House wife	Handcraft
X3	24	Married	High school	Textile	Textile
X4	36	Widow	Bachelor degree	Engineer	Secretary
X5	23	Married	High school	Cosmetic	Cosmetic
X6	19	Single	High school	Student	Tailor
X7	31	Married	Primary school	House wife	Handcraft
X8	31	Married	High school	Mosque teacher	Textile
X9	27	Married	Illiterate	House Wife	Cleaning
X10	29	Married	Bachelor degree	Teacher	NGO worker

Source: Authors elaboration

As seen in Table 4, the fact that the refugee participants X4 and X10 are graduated from university and each of them has professional status. It can be an important indicator in terms of evaluating the employment of qualified workforce. Another important point is that the education of X1, X3, X5, and X6 ended after they became refugees. X9 has never been to school. Four participants, X1, X2, X7 and X9, were seen to be housewives before the refugee status but when they moved to Turkey, they started to work. All of the participants are married except X4 and X6. X4 stated that her husband died 3 years ago. According to age groups, there are X4, X7 and X8 participants over the age of 30. Only X3 and X5 are doing the same thing in Turkey as they do in Syria.

Table 5. Households of Participants

	Household Income Status	Number of Children	Rent Amount	Number of Households
X1	2750 TL	3	600 TL	6
X2	3300 TL	4	750 TL	8
X3	3750 TL	2	750 TL	4
X4	3000 TL	2	680 TL	3
X5	2200 TL	1	550 TL	3
X6	3500 TL	-	850 TL	5
X7	2850 TL	5	550 TL	7
X8	3000 TL	3	680 TL	5
X9	1850 TL	2	475 TL	4
X10	4200 TL	3	800 TL	5

Source: Authors elaboration

Table 5 contains information about the households of the participants. In this study, it is seen that the lower limit of the monthly household income of the refugees is 1850 TL and the upper limit is 4200 TL. The participation of a female individual in employment increases the household income. It is also seen that household income is related to education level and professional status. As in the example of X4 and X10, women with an educated and professional status can make a significant contribution to their families' household income. X4 lost her husband and she is the only one who has to work to take care of her children. All participants live in the rented house. Rental fees vary between 475-850 TL. All of the participants have children except X6. She has not married yet. X1 and X2 live in a crowded house. The reason is might be the high rental fees.

Table 6. Working conditions of Syrian Women Refugees

	Profession in Turkey	Salary	Insurance	Working time per day
X1	Cleaning	600 TL	No	12 hours
X2	Handcraft	400-500 TL	No	4-5 hours
X3	Textile	900 TL	Yes	10 hours
X4	Secretary	3000 TL(Food+ Road allowances included)	Yes	9 hours
X5	Cosmetic	800 TL	No	6 hours
X6	Tailor	750 TL	No	11 hours
X7	Handcraft	350 TL	No	3-5 hours
X8	Textile	1000 TL	Yes	12 hours
X9	Cleaning	650 TL	No	12 hours
X10	NGO worker	2200 TL	Yes	8 hours

Source: Authors elaboration

As table 6 shown X1, X8 and X9 works longer (12 hours) and receives lower wages (600 TL-900 TL) than others. Education level and professional experience of the person can directly affect what they obtain from the labor market. For instance; X1 (high school, cleaning), X2 (secondary school, handcraft), X7 (primary school, handcraft) and X9 (Illiterate, cleaning) have very low salary and high working hours. Among the participants 40 % of them have insurance. 60 % of them works without insurance. X1, X2, X5, X8 and X9 stated that they have to work in order to help their husbands. All of the participants confirm that they have started to work with the help of their acquaintances, relatives and neighbors. It is seen that Syrian refugee network is large and be able to help eachother. Only X4 is receiving food and road allowance. Participants stated that there is a difference between the wages they receive and the wages of the local labor force. Refugee women stated that they did not encounter incidents such as violence, abuse and humiliation in the workplace. Most of them said the biggest problem was finding a job. 100 % said that the biggest handicap was not to speak Turkish. This research shows that they admitted that their biggest handicap was not knowing Turkish, but they did not make any effort to learn Turkish.

6. CONCLUSION

This study, conducted with the Ankara sample, makes some inferences based on the understanding relationship within the framework of the limitations of qualitative research.

Turkey is one of the largest and most powerful countries with a population of over 80 million. Furthermore, Turkey is one of the countries with the crowd and the young population in Europe. For this reason, an active labor market in Turkey is an indispensable prerequisite in terms of sustainable development and prosperity. Labor market in Turkey, exhibits a structure divided into sections resulting from the coexistence of formal and non-formal sector. The formal sector unites employees from large enterprises, both public and private, in city centers. The informal sector includes a very high proportion of workers from small businesses. National labor markets are limitedly open for refugees. In addition, the lack of work permit documents, their lack of language skills, and the lack diploma equivalents also drive refugees into unsecured, temporary and irregular work areas. Refugee women also work in labor-intensive sectors like men, in heavy and dangerous jobs, with low wages and without security. The fact that they were employed without security, received lower wages compared to men and could only find a place for themselves in certain job / occupational fields did not prevent women from working. It is possible to see one of the personal change and transformation processes experienced through employment in women's thoughts and clothing. X4 stated that she had stereotypes about Turkish people but after working 2 years she got rid of it.

Syrian refugees earn the lowest wage despite doing heavier work and staying at work longer. Wage difference varies according to the job done. While low wages reach significant differences in unskilled jobs, they are closer to local workers in skilled jobs. The employment of Syrians as cheap labor, informal work, compounded by the economic crisis; it causes worsening of working conditions and a downward trend, especially in wages. In order to determine the effect of international labor migration on unemployment and other economic variables in the most accurate way, illegal labor migration, that is, irregular migration, should be eliminated completely.

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