

Syrian Refugees¹ in Turkish Labour Market: Exclusion or Integration?

ABSTRACT

Nobody could have anticipated that the Arab Spring would eventually create the largest refugee crisis of the century. As Syria's largest neighbour Turkey has been significantly affected by the crisis. The number of registered Syrian refugees living in Turkey has reached to 2.7 million since April 2011², and it is estimated that more than 300 thousand of them are employed informally (TİSK, 2015: 45). The expectation that the conflict in Syria would end and refugees return to their homes soon is no longer realistic. However, until recently Turkish policy makers perceived the migration flows from Syria to Turkey as a temporary phenomenon. The residency of Syrian immigrants has been regulated under non-permanent immigration status such as "guest migrant" or "temporary protection". Until the "Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees Under Temporary Protection" was issued in the Official Journal No. 2016/8375, legal working opportunities of refugees was not considered as a part of the issue. Formal employment is the most important instrument towards ensuring the socio-economic integration of immigrants; in fact, 85% of Syrian refugees live out of the camps and have already integrated into Turkish informal economy in order to meet their basic needs. Some studies report that, most refugees earn far less than the minimum wage while working more than eight hours. Consequently, a strong competition between Syrian and Turkish labour force has developed, especially in border cities hosting most of the refugees. According to the research of Erdogan (2014), 56.1% of the Turkish public, support the proposition "Syrians are taking away our jobs", while in the border provinces the support increases to 68.9 %.

In this study I will analyse the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkish labour market within the context of legal regulations and existing literature. In the first section, I will present an overview of Turkey's immigration laws focusing on the labour rights and employment of refugees and asylum seekers. The second section will examine the condition of Syrian refugees in the labour markets in terms of wages, work hours, social security, child employment, and competition with native workforce.

¹ In this study I will use the term refugee referring to Syrian immigrants –per their international status-, however the current regulations in Turkey does not regard them as refugees but asylum seekers or under temporary protection instead.

² http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik