

The Role of Refugee Labor in Konya's Agricultural Sector: An Evaluation through Local Actors

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Makale Bilgileri	ABSTRACT
Makale Geçmişi Geliş: 25/11/2024 Kabul: 26/12/2024 Yayın: 31/12/2024 Anahtar Kelimeler: Agriculture, Refugee Labor, Employment, Konya. JEL Kodları: F22, J21, Q19	Türkiye holds a significant position globally in the agricultural sector. However, several factors, such as rural-to-urban migration, employment abroad, the reluctance of young adults to work in agriculture, climate change, and structural issues within the sector, have led to a decline in the number of domestic workers engaged in agriculture. The problem of employment in agriculture-based areas is tried to be solved through refugee labor. This study aims to explore the contributions of refugee labor to the agricultural sector in Konya by examining the perspectives of business owners operating in the sector, as well as institutional and local managers representing the agricultural industry. In addition, it seeks to understand the contributions of refugee labor, the challenges faced in this area, and the expectations and solutions proposed by these stakeholders. This study employs a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews to thematically explore three key areas: the critical role of refugee labor in agriculture, the existing risks, and proposed solutions. The findings reveal that the labor shortage in agriculture is being mitigated by the employment of refugee labor. Additionally, the study identifies that issues related to residency and work permits for refugees have led to an increase in informal employment within the sector.

Konya Tarım Sektöründe Sığınmacı İşgücünün Rolü: Yerel Aktörler Üzerinden Bir Değerlendirme

Article Info	ÖZ
Article History Received: 25/11/2024 Accepted: 26/12/2024 Published: 31/12/2024 Keywords: Tarım, Sığınmacı İşgücü, İstihdam, Konya. Jel Codes: F22, J21, Q19	Türkiye, tarım sektörü açısından küresel olarak önemli bir konumdadır. Fakat köylerden kentlere göçün etkisi, yurtdışında çalışma, genç yetişkin işgücünün tarım sektörünü tercih etmemesi, iklim değişikliği ve tarım sektöründeki yapısal sorunlar gibi pek çok sebep bu sektörde çalışan yerli nüfusun sayısını azaltmıştır. Tarıma dayalı alanlarda istihdam sorunu ise son on yıl içinde artan sığınmacı işçi gücü üzerinden çözülmeye çalışılmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Konya tarım sektöründe faaliyet gösteren işletme sahipleri, tarım sektörünü temsil eden kurumsal ve yerel yöneticilerin kırsal alanlarda istihdam edilen sığınmacılara yönelik kanaatleri doğrultusunda sığınmacı iş gücünün tarıma katkısının neler olduğu bu alanlarda karşılaşılan sorunlar, beklentiler ve çözüm önerilerini ele almaktır. Mevcut literatür mevsimlik tarım işçilerinin eğitim, sağlık, barınma gibi temel yaşam şartları, sığınmacı işgücünün olumlu olumsuz etkileri, kent alanlarında yaşayan sığınmacılar gibi konular üzerinde odaklanmıştır. Fakat bizzat tarım sektörünün içinde, sahadaki sorunlarla birebir karşılaşan işverenlerin kanaatleri ve sığınmacı işgücünün tarım sektörüne katkısını ele alan çalışmaların sayısı sınırlıdır. Çalışma nitel yöntem ve yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat tekniği kullanılarak tarım sektöründeki sığınmacı işgücünün kritik rolü, mevcut riskler ve çözüm önerileri olarak üç başlıkta temalandırılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları tarımdaki istihdam açığının sığınmacı işgücü üzerinden giderildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca sığınmacı işgücünün ikamet, çalışma izinlerindeki sorunların kayıt dışı istihdama sebebiyet verdiği tespit edilmiştir.

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INTRODUCTION

A great number of people are compelled to leave their homes and migrate due to a variety of factors, including war, conflict, political instability, crises, economic disparities, and natural disasters. The global impacts of forced migration are also felt in critical areas such as agriculture and food security. The ongoing war in Ukraine, involving two of the world's largest producers of staple grains, oilseeds, and fertilizers, has particularly disrupted international supply chains, leading to increased prices for grains, fertilizers, energy, and prepared foods (FAO, 2022). According to the Food Price Index, these prices reached an all-time high in 2022 (FAO, 2024). In this context, the strategic importance of food supply and, by extension, agriculture remains critical on a global scale. The failure to ensure food security and supply threatens millions of people with the prospect of hunger. According to the Global Food Crises Report (GRFC), more than 281.6 million people across 59 countries and regions faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 2023. The continued operation of the agricultural sector, even during the food crisis and pandemic exacerbated by the Russia-Ukraine war, highlighted the sector's vital and indispensable role. Agriculture, encompassing activities such as the production and processing of plant and animal products to meet living needs, not only fulfills humanity's basic nutritional requirements but also supplies essential raw materials for both animal husbandry and the manufacturing industry.

With 0.8 percent of the world's agricultural land, Türkiye ranks as the tenth largest agricultural country globally, boasting exports valued at USD 21 billion and a production capacity of USD 70 billion. Türkiye also holds a strong position in agricultural product diversity, supported by the third largest seed bank in the world. As both a producer and exporter of vegetables, fruits, and other commodities, Türkiye has the capacity to influence the global agricultural market across a wide range of products (İstikbal, 2020). The country's impressive annual production figures 23 million tons of milk, 1.2 million tons of meat, 1.24 million tons of seeds, 2.46 million tons of forage crops, 24 million tons of fruits, 31 million tons of vegetables, and 37 million tons of cereals highlight the significant potential of its agricultural sector (İstikbal, 2022: 21). However, the agriculture and livestock sectors in Türkiye face several challenges that need to be addressed.

These include the prevalence of dry farming across the majority of agricultural lands, insufficient irrigation water, rising fuel and fertilizer costs, inadequate adoption of modern agricultural techniques, and widespread misinformation. Beyond these structural issues, rural employment poses another significant challenge. Agricultural employment in Türkiye has been on a downward trend, with the share of agriculture in total employment decreasing from 17.8% in 2020 to 15.8% in 2022 (TBB, 2023). In Türkiye, where 93.4 percent of the population resides in provincial and district centers, the decline in the rural population has contributed to a decrease in agricultural employment. In 2023, 4.695 million people were employed in the agricultural sector, representing a decrease of 171,000 from the previous year (TÜİK, 2023). This downward trend has persisted over the years. With the majority of agricultural workers being over the age of forty-five (TBB, 2023: 79), several factors—such as the declining interest of younger generations in agriculture, accelerated rural-to-urban migration, difficulties in ensuring a stable income, reluctance of spouses to live in rural areas, and the increasing focus on employment in the service sector—have collectively contributed to a loss of labor force in agriculture and agriculture-based industries. The ongoing need for personnel in agriculture and animal husbandry is periodically emphasized by industry leaders. The continuity and development of the agricultural sector heavily depend on the availability of a robust workforce. In this context, the issue of employment in agriculture has become a pressing concern. To address this challenge, producers and employers have increasingly turned to the labor force provided by asylum-seekers. Indeed, regardless of their legal status, migrants often seek to meet their basic needs and sustain their livelihoods (Arıcıoğlu & Afkari, 2023: 18). Türkiye currently hosts a significant number of asylum-seekers fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Notably, there are 3,103,606 Syrians under temporary protection (GİB, 2024). As noted in the "Syrian Asylum Seekers in Türkiye" report published by AFAD (2013), the majority of Syrians arriving in Türkiye come from rural areas, where agriculture and animal husbandry were their primary sources of livelihood. The same study indicates that most Syrians belong to the lower income group, with the majority having only a primary school education. In essence, a significant portion of the Syrians who migrated to Türkiye come from rural backgrounds, where their main livelihoods were centered around

agriculture and animal husbandry. Similarly, farming and animal husbandry are also the primary sources of livelihood for the majority of Afghan nationals (Kara & Tilbe, 2023: 1417). In other words, these groups, lacking experience with urban practices, face significant challenges in adapting to urban life. Those unable to cope with the difficulties of urban living—such as finding a job, low income, housing issues, high rent, and social adaptation—often choose to reside in rural areas where they can continue their pre-migration livelihoods. This labor force is expected to contribute to the Turkish economy, particularly in agriculture, agriculture-based livestock, and the related industries and service sectors. When evaluating the literature, various reports and studies—such as *Seasonal Mobile Agricultural Labor*, *Syrian Asylum Seekers Working in Agricultural Activities: The Case of Altınözü (Hatay)*, and *Foreign Migrant Workers in Seasonal Agricultural Production in Türkiye* highlight that asylum-seeker labor and seasonal workers help address the shortage of intermediate staff in agricultural activities (Koyuncu, 2018: 271). The findings of these studies are generally consistent in this regard. However, much of the existing research has concentrated on issues such as the living conditions of asylum-seeking labor, poverty and deprivation, child labor, and the positive and negative impacts of asylum-seeking workers. There are comparatively few studies that focus on the perspectives of employers who are directly involved in the agricultural sector, face the challenges in the field firsthand, and understand the contribution of asylum-seeker labor to the agricultural sector. In this context, the study aims to evaluate the contributions of asylum-seekers employed in the agricultural sector to agriculture, the challenges faced by both asylum-seekers and employers, and the expectations and potential solutions to these challenges based on field interviews conducted in Konya. By capturing the firsthand experiences of employers in their socio-economic interactions with asylum-seeker labor and examining the impact on the social fabric, this study holds the potential to contribute original insights to the relevant literature.

1. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Migrations have impacted various areas, including legal procedures, the healthcare system, the economy, and culture, sparking discussions around the associated challenges and solutions. To explore the employment of asylum-seekers in rural areas—specifically within the agricultural sector in Konya—interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the process. These interviews aimed to uncover the core issues, expectations, and proposed solutions related to the employment of asylum-seekers, with the goal of generating common solutions for both Konya and the broader national context. The research focuses on evaluating the contribution of refugee labor to agriculture, based on the perspectives of business owners in Konya's agricultural sector, as well as institutional and local administrators representing the sector. The study also seeks to identify the challenges, expectations, and potential solutions encountered in these areas.

Given the subject and objectives of this research, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth analysis that considers the expectations of various stakeholders and business owners in the agricultural sector regarding the employment of asylum-seekers. This includes examining the qualifications of the workforce, the underlying causes of current employment risks, the forms of economic relations and interactions, and their perspectives on these issues. Consequently, a qualitative research method was chosen. To gather detailed and comprehensive information, semi-structured interviews were employed as the data collection technique. The study utilized a maximum variation sampling technique to ensure a wide range of perspectives on the topic, representing diverse viewpoints. In this context, the sample included interviews with officials from institutions directly and indirectly related to the employment of asylum-seekers in the agricultural sector, such as the Konya Provincial Migration Administration, Social Security Institution, and İŞKUR Representatives, as well as members of the Konya Chamber of Agriculture, representatives from the Meram and Karatay Chambers of Agriculture, and small, medium, and large business owners employing asylum-seekers in the villages of Çarıklar, Dağdere, Yenikent, and Kaşınham within Konya's central districts.

The semi-structured interviews focused on the causes, impacts, and challenges of employing asylum-seekers, as well as the associated problem areas and potential solutions. Conducted between July and August 2024, the interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes each and involved 25 participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The data obtained were interpreted using discourse analysis, a method that allows participants to express their perceptions and

thoughts on the subject and how they make sense of it. As is well-known, discourse fundamentally constructs meaning, shaping how individuals within a society think and communicate. Discourse analysis broadly refers to the study of language as it is used among people, whether in written texts or oral contexts (Gül & Nizam, 2020: 189). The main reason for choosing discourse analysis in this research is not to explain the data obtained or to make normative judgements, but to make in-depth readings for understanding and interpretation. In this context, the themes of “The Critical Role of Asylum Seeker Labor in the Agricultural Sector”, “Existing Risks in Asylum Seeker Employment” and “Solution Suggestions Against Risks in Asylum Seeker Employment” emerged in the research.

This study was prepared within the scope of permission from Necmettin Erbakan University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee dated 31/05/2024 and numbered 19698.

2. OVERVIEW OF KONYA AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Konya, as one of the oldest settlements of Anatolia, is a center of attraction in many sectors such as agriculture, trade, transportation and tourism both in Türkiye and in the Central Anatolia Region, a production base that acts as a locomotive for other provinces in the region and makes significant contributions to the national economy. Konya province, which is the most important stronghold of Türkiye especially in agriculture and animal husbandry, is the province with the largest land area of the country with a surface area of 40,838 km² (including lakes), which corresponds to 5.24% of Türkiye's surface area of 780,043 km² and agriculture is carried out on 1,882,068 hectares. When the 2022 distribution of agricultural areas is analyzed on the basis of regions, it is seen that the highest agricultural area is located in the Central Anatolia Region with a share of 32.5% (TBB, 2023: 52).

Konya accounts for 10% of Türkiye's total agricultural production. Irrigated agriculture is practiced in 609.299 ha area in Konya province. Konya has 5.24% surface area, 7.86% agricultural area, 2.80% forest area, 5.75% meadow pasture area, 4.34% other lands in Türkiye. 80.067 percent of the agricultural area is used for field crops. It actually operates in the agricultural sector with a total of 154,805 farmers registered in the Farmer Registration and Turkvvet System (Konya Agriculture, 2024). Konya's exports in 2023 amounted to 3.305 million dollars with an increase of 1.4% compared to the previous year and ranked 10th in the list of provinces with the highest exports (KTO, 2023). Türkiye's agricultural exports increased by 15.3% in 2022 compared to the previous year and reached 34 billion 246 million dollars, and with this increase, the agricultural sector realized the highest exports in its history (KTB, 2022: 20).

When we look at the production amounts of plant products produced in Konya, 90.4% of the total production consists of cereals and other vegetable products, 7% of vegetables and 2.7% of fruits. Konya produces 90% of Türkiye's total tulip production, 67% of carrot production, 33% of sugar beet production, 23% of grain corn production, 10% of barley production and 15% of wheat production. In addition, Konya ranks first in eleven crops with a 38% share of total seed production such as Hungarian vetch, sainfoin seed, lupine, canola, and birdseed. Konya meets 6.39% of Türkiye's crop production value and 5.66% of livestock value and ranks first with a total agricultural production value of 6.07% (Konya Agriculture, 2024: 17). Konya produced 5 million 280 thousand tons of cereals in 2022. This shows that the amount of production increased by 42.5% compared to 2021 (KTO, 2023).

In addition to being known as a granary, Konya is also increasing its share in the amount of greenhouse vegetable and fruit production. According to 2020 data, Konya ranked 31st in Türkiye in greenhouse production and doubled its share in the country in five years. Konya ranks 2nd in potato, lentil, cherry and sour cherry production, 3rd in strawberry and melon production, and 6th in apple production. It also has an important place in oilseed production (Yetkin, 2021: 21). The exports of the cereals, pulses, oilseeds and products sector, which is one of the important items of Türkiye's exports, reached 11.5 billion dollars in 2022 with an increase of 25.4 percent compared to the previous year (KTB, 2022: 19). In 2023, 77.7 million tons of cereals and other crops, 31.8 million tons of vegetables, and 27.4 million tons of fruits, beverages and spice crops were produced (TÜİK, 2023). Cereal, fruit and vegetable production has increased compared to 2022. In Konya, the majority of public investments are allocated to the agriculture sector and agriculture accounts for 30% of total public investments. However, it is one of the least benefited provinces from investment incentives in the agriculture sector.

Konya's leading role in its sector is also reflected in its industry. Konya can produce 90 percent of the parts used in tractors and 100 percent of the parts used in agricultural machinery and holds 65 percent of the Turkish market in this field. Konya has the largest share in Türkiye's flour, sugar and salt production, and Türkiye's most important and high-capacity wheat flour factories are located in Konya. It has also become the largest supply center in milk and dairy products and sugar and sugary products industry (İŞKUR, 2022). Looking at the number of agriculture-based enterprises, bakery products are the highest with 572. This is followed by bread and bread varieties production, pastry products production, milk and dairy products production. (Konya Agricultural Investment Guide, 2022).

In short, Konya has a leading position in agriculture. Considering the agriculture-based industry and livestock breeding enterprises that include milk, meat, flour, cereals, olive oil and many other products, Konya is a great source of employment for the agricultural sector and the backbone of the country's agricultural economy. Konya has an important position not only in agriculture but also in animal husbandry. As of 2023, Konya ranks first in Türkiye with 928 thousand cattle, second in Türkiye with 3 million 59 thousand ovine and second in Türkiye with 10 million 702 thousand poultry (Konya Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023: 14). Konya, one of the three provinces with the highest number of endemic plants in Türkiye, has many advantages such as 149,346 treasury lands with a total area of 8.6 billion m², large pasture areas, approximately 25 million m² Organized Livestock Area, rapidly increasing modern dairy production enterprises and Türkiye's leadership in egg poultry. However, there are also problem areas in the agriculture and livestock sectors that need to be addressed. One of the most fundamental problems is the fact that approximately 70% of agricultural land is dry farmed, and that irrigation water is inadequate and costly. In addition, poor character of pastures, insufficient quality roughage in animal husbandry, high energy, fuel and fertilizer costs, inability to export fresh fruits and vegetables from the region to all countries, lack of information and misinformation are other problem areas. These problems significantly affect the productivity, quality and capacity of the agriculture and livestock sectors. However, among the primary problems of the sector is the high number of small enterprises whose labor force consists of the head of the family and other members of the family. When small and fragmented lands are added to this, a structure emerges in which enterprises cannot be managed professionally, therefore record keeping and accounting procedures are not carried out sufficiently, modern agricultural techniques and agricultural technologies cannot be used sufficiently, agricultural organization is inadequate (producer organizations such as unions/cooperatives do not exist or are not effective), in short, the labor given is not compensated (Konya Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, 2019: 205).

The employment problem in rural areas is another dimension of the issue. Agriculture and animal husbandry, which are among the priority sectors for Konya's economy, have become an area that the local population does not prefer much with urbanization. The increase in migration from rural to urban areas, the young population's orientation towards job opportunities in non-agricultural areas, and the fact that many parents direct their children to non-agricultural areas have increased the labor shortage in the agriculture and livestock sector in rural areas. This situation has paved the way for the employment of Afghan and Syrian asylum seekers in rural areas. Konya employment statistics show a decrease of 2.2 percent in the farmer group in 2023 and 0.7 percent in 2024 (KTO, 2023: 11). As a matter of fact, the decline in the number of farmers and agricultural employment supports the labor shortage. The labor shortage deeply affected by migration from rural areas to urban areas has been tried to be solved through daily wage workers in agricultural areas and seasonal workers, especially during hoeing and harvesting, and through foreign nationals, mostly Afghanistan and Syrian nationals, and seasonal workers from the local community in the field of animal husbandry.

Asylum-seekers who could not get a foothold in urban areas or who were active in the agricultural sector in their countries of origin have turned to rural areas and, as in many sectors, the door has been opened to the employment of asylum-seekers in rural areas as well as in heavy labor branches that local people do not prefer. This situation has also formed the basis for academic studies discussing the expectations of the local people from the refugee labor force in terms of the human resources needed by the local people in the agricultural sector in terms of quality and quantity, their capacity to do business and work ethics, the existing risk areas in employment, the experience of living together, and so on. This

study is the product of an academic effort to analyze the aforementioned topics.

3. REFUGEE LABOR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

Although the direction of migration is mostly towards developed countries and countries with a high humanitarian life index, it is known that 69% of people in need of international protection and refugees are hosted by countries neighboring their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2023). Indeed, Türkiye has been affected by sudden and mass migration due to its proximity to the Syrian border. In addition, the end of the 20-year US military presence in Afghanistan in 2021 caused serious concern among the people of the country and led to a sudden increase in migration from Afghanistan (IOM, 2024). Türkiye, which also receives migration from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia and Sudan, has become a target country after the 2000s. According to the 2024 World Migration Report published by the United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM), Türkiye is the country with the highest number of refugees in the world (approximately 3.6 million). Türkiye's unpreparedness for this sudden and mass migration and the failure to keep some basic records has turned into a phenomenon that affects many structures such as politics, education, economy, health, culture, etc. Konya is among the provinces affected by this wave of migration and hosts the highest number of refugees. According to the data of the Migration Management, 120. 553 Syrians are under temporary protection (GİB, 2024). Considering the data received from STK representatives, it is estimated that there are 200 thousand asylum-seekers in Konya, including unregistered ones.

Although the developments in Syria have strengthened the expectation of a return, the speed of migration processes due to returns and the existence of possible new waves of migration give the impression that there will be no change in the temporary protection status. As a matter of fact, the migration process continues with new waves such as Afghanistan, Ukraine, Palestine, etc. Therefore, the tendency of migrants to become permanent has increased. This situation shows that the reactions against asylum seekers, who were initially in the position of guests, have now turned into discourses of return to your country based on economic concerns at the social and political level. Of course, migration has caused many economic, political, economic, socio-cultural effects in the target country. Migration policies, political tensions, public expenditures on access to basic needs such as health, education and housing, social cohesion and employment are examples of these effects. However, rather than being an economic burden, migration can be turned into an advantage and contribute to the economy when the destination country manages and directs migration within the scope of migration policies. As a matter of fact, it has been determined that incoming asylum-seekers meet the need for intermediate and unskilled labor in social reality, especially in cities with developed industry and economy.

In this sense, they have provided an economic opportunity for themselves and their business owners. This situation is more prominent in the agricultural sector. Considering that the agriculture and livestock sector cannot meet the labor shortage from the existing local population and that modern agricultural techniques and agricultural technologies are not sufficiently used, labor-intensive jobs in the agricultural sector are met by asylum-seekers, especially Syrian and Afghan asylum-seekers. The access of asylum-seekers to the labor market and their ability to earn income in this way and to sustain their lives without the need for individual assistance from the state, non-governmental organizations and citizens will eliminate many causes of social tension and will mean that they will move from the position of being a burden to the position of contributing to society (Duruel, 2017: 207). In this respect, the refugee labor force has the potential and obligation to meet the need in the agricultural sector.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. *The Critical Role of Refugee Labor in the Agricultural Sector*

The agricultural sector is one of the cornerstones of the economy, meeting the basic needs of humanity. However, there are many wrong practices in the agricultural sector, especially land use. The opening of large fertile lands to the industrial sector and the cultivation of crops that are not suitable for the soil (Yiğitbaşıoğlu, 2000: 7) can be given as examples. In addition, there are a number of problems such as high costs (electricity, diesel oil, fertilizer, pesticides), inadequate farmer training and practices

- there is also a need to encourage the young population to agricultural production -, fragmented and scattered agricultural lands, low yield and quality due to fertilization, irrigation, etc. in production, inefficient use of existing water resources (TOBB, 2013: 67-69). Today, however, there are also developments related to the current solution of these problems. For example, investments such as land consolidation, GAP, KOP, DAP are being made to ensure change and sustainability in the agricultural structure and to strengthen sectors such as industry, trade and transportation. However, the differences in education, culture, health and social services within the region and the main problems in agriculture have led to the migration of human capital from rural to urban areas. Therefore, the young population has started to work in sectors other than agriculture and animal husbandry. It has been stated that young people are not oriented towards the agricultural sector and that the shortage of personnel in this field should be eliminated permanently.

With the increase in reading rates, we have a shortage of workers. Race is not important in agriculture, we need agricultural workers. Even if we offer high salaries plus insurance to our Turkish workers, they will not do this job. We cannot even get our own children to do it (Representative of Meram Chamber of Agriculture).

There are no young people to work in the village; after a certain age they either go to study or work. The reason I employ Syrians is that there is no local labor force to work. Local people do not want these jobs; agricultural work is too laborious and tiring for them. They don't prefer this kind of work when there are easier jobs that pay more. Besides, if they were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, they would have to live here. But the opportunities in the city are wider, especially for those with children. That is why they do not think of coming here (F. Ü. Male, Dağdere, 44 years old).

In general, all stakeholders in the agricultural sector agree that young people, especially their own children, are not oriented towards the agricultural sector. The necessity to be in the village in order to work in agriculture, the lack of comfort and opportunities of village life as much as urban life, and the demand to earn money easily and effortlessly are among the reasons why young people do not turn to agriculture. In addition, it was emphasized that the perception of “peasantry” in the eyes of the individual and society negatively affects the sector.

Unfortunately, there is a misperception among young people and society in general about professions such as animal husbandry, animal care or shepherding; unfortunately, these professions are seen as inferior and worthless. There are very few shepherders in the whole village (S.H. Male, Çarıklar, 48 years old).

Increasing the duration of compulsory education to twelve years, the unwillingness of young people in rural areas to work in their own fields, Turkish citizens' perception of wages as inadequate, the lack of the concept of working hours in the agriculture and livestock sector, rural women's preference to live in urban areas in case of marriage, and the high average age of the population working in agriculture have led to the problem of employment in the agricultural sector in rural areas. It is observed that the local population does not prefer to work in agriculture for the aforementioned reasons, and thus, there is an increasing gap in agricultural employment every year. In addition to seasonal workers, daily wage workers, and laborers working in agriculture, the importance of foreign nationals for the sector has been emphasized. As a matter of fact, current Trade Minister Bolat recently stated that despite the abundance of products, farmers had a problem of lack of personnel, that this deficit was not covered by foreign workers, and that if twenty-five thousand Afghan shepherds left today, there would be no agriculture and animal husbandry left. The contribution of foreign nationals to the economy and the need for these people have often been expressed by sector representatives. In this sense, Syrian and Afghan nationals are considered to be a compulsory alternative to overcome the employment deficit in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry.

As agriculturalists, no matter what they call refugees or asylum seekers, we know that the developed countries of the EU have reached the position we are discussing today thanks to the labor force of refugees/migrants. The absence of immigrants in our country means the bankruptcy of Turkish agriculture. If there were no immigrants in Konya, our sector would come to a complete halt. Some regions host many migrants, let's pull these people out tomorrow morning and exports will stop. Without immigrants, Türkiye would lose its labor force (Representative of Meram Chamber of Agriculture).

When we say refugees, it is as if they are a hump on Türkiye's back. In fact, they are a blessing of God for Türkiye's development. They came to us like speed when we were in trouble. Without Afghans, agriculture would end, we would sell our animals (Representative of Karatay Chamber of Agriculture)

I think that the reason why Syrians and Afghans are tolerated or supported to come to our country is because of their contributions, especially in animal husbandry and many other sectors. Just as Turks contributed to Germany in the past, today Syrians and Afghans are making significant contributions to the development of our country, especially in agriculture and animal husbandry. If it were not for Afghans and Syrians, the agricultural sector would collapse completely (Ö.E. Male, Çarıklar, 40 years old).

It is stated that if the refugee labor force withdraws from the agricultural sector, agriculture and animal husbandry will suffer, therefore this labor force is an opportunity and a savior. The statements of the participants prove the necessity of refugee employment for the continuation of the contribution of the agricultural sector to the Turkish economy. Thus, the problem of insufficient employment of the local population in the field of agriculture is solved by the refugee labor force, especially Afghan and Syrian nationals, and turns into an area of opportunity. It is seen that Afghan nationals are preferred especially in animal husbandry and agriculture. Since they have worked in agriculture in their country of origin, they are more experienced in these jobs and generally experience more challenging conditions, so they do not avoid labor-intensive work. In fact, the work here is less burdensome. Since most Afghans working in the agricultural sector are single, their expenses are lower and they do not need urban facilities (such as education and health) since they do not have children. Due to their status, since most of them come illegally, i.e. they work unregistered, they do not have any problem in doing the work (demand, request, order) given by the employer, and in the words of the employers, they work harmoniously, hardworking and have work ethics. In addition to animal care, they do field irrigation, water pipe installation and collection, bale collection and gardening. In short, they help with whatever needs to be done daily in a village. The fact that Afghan workers reside near their employers in the village has provided flexibility in working hours and they have accepted to work not only in one job but in all jobs related to agriculture and animal husbandry. However, labor exploitation is ignored when low wages and flexibility in working hours are taken into consideration.

Afghan workers are both clean and very adaptable. They don't have a problem like running away from work and they are very meticulous. Even if we find Turkish workers, they usually do not want to stay in the fields. Afghans, on the other hand, accept to stay in the fields. Recently there has been an increase in thefts in the fields; pipes are being stolen and the cost of a pipe is very high. Afghan workers also work as watchmen. The young people in the village want to go back home in the evenings, who will walk 10 kilometers every day (M.A. Male, Kaşınhanı, 57 years old).

For 8 years we have been employing Afghans. We pay about 30 thousand monthly. We also meet their housing and grocery needs. If you hire a laborer in the village, he asks for a fee for every job he does. Afghans take care of everything day and night (E.Ç. Female, Dağdere, 42 years old).

I trust the Afghani very much, I entrusted everything to him for 4-5 days and there were no problems. Syrians stressed me out, I was afraid that my teeth would fall out. I worked for 3 months and then I quit. Syrians are very incompatible, they were never satisfied with the money they received (A.Ş. Male, Kaşınhanı, 58 years old).

One of the points emphasized by the interviewees is that Syrian workers are more maladaptive, lazy and less productive than Afghans, demand high wages and tend to leave their jobs halfway through. They also state that Syrian workers do not attach importance to cleanliness and privacy. In this respect, it can be said that cultural proximity is effective on asylum-seeker labor force. In the agricultural sector in general and in the livestock sector, which is closely related to this sector, the employment of asylum-seekers is considered as a compulsory alternative. According to the field notes, employers make an effort to keep asylum-seeker labor force. In addition to high salaries, household expenses and personal needs are met. However, there are some existing risks in retaining this labor force.

4.2. Existing Risks in Asylum Seeker Employment

The majority of foreigners employed in rural areas in Türkiye are from Afghanistan and Syria. The majority of Afghanistan nationals are illegal asylum seekers who entered the country through unofficial means. Syrians in our country are under temporary protection status. With the Temporary Protection Regulation, it has been published that foreigners benefiting from temporary protection status can be provided with health, education, access to the labor market, social assistance and services, interpretation and similar services (GİB, 2024). In this context, in addition to access to many services, access to the labor market has also been provided. One of these sectors is agriculture. However, regardless of nationality, the most important problem in the employment of asylum-seekers in the agricultural sector is unregistered employment. Unregistered employment causes both economic and social problems such as financial problems such as not deducting taxes from the income of the production and service performed, working with low wages in general, being outside the social security system and not benefiting from maternity, sickness, accident and old age insurance opportunities (Mahiroğulları, 2017: 548). Konya, Karaman informal employment rate is 34.85% in 2021. As a branch of economic activity, the highest rate of unregistered employment was recorded in agriculture, forestry and fishing with 84.56% (SGK, 2021). There are existing risks associated with the non-registration of foreign nationals working in agriculture for many reasons. The most emphasized risks by agricultural sector representatives and business owners are unregistered employment, temporary protection, work permits, access to health services and work ethics.

Irrigation season starts, they come, and when someone else offers them higher wages, they run away. The work is left in the middle, especially the care of livestock. We need to find a solution to this situation. (...) We did not protect the rights and laws of asylum seekers in Konya enough, so they went to other regions. Afghans are the last exit for Turkish agriculture. If we lose this, the country's agriculture will collapse. We should register and employ them (Representative of Karatay Chamber of Agriculture).

Problems arising from both employers and asylum-seekers regarding the registration of asylum-seekers are noteworthy. Employers make cost calculations and do not prefer to employ insured workers. In terms of Afghanistan nationals, unregistered employment continues to exist as it is not possible to register foreigners who enter the country unofficially in the current system. Asylum-seekers from both Syria and Afghanistan are unlikely to become citizens due to their current status, they are deprived of the right to retire and to receive a pension and pension bonus, and therefore they prefer that the insurance premium to be paid to the state be paid to them. For the same reason, the perception that it is not possible for them to reside permanently in Türkiye keeps this demand alive. In addition, being registered and working according to official procedures takes away the comfort of changing workplaces without any procedures, which is common among asylum-seeking labor. Whichever employer offers more cash, the asylum seeker can leave their current workplace on the same day, which on the one hand allows them to determine the market and raise wages, but on the other hand, knowing that they will not be subject to

any official or institutional investigation and punishment for their actions is among the factors that trigger informal employment. This is, of course, one of the most fundamental problem areas for employers. Problems such as problems with work discipline and sustainability, regular absenteeism, arbitrary quitting of work and not informing the employer in this case bring along uncertainties and insecurity regarding the asylum-seeker labor force, and this issue also negatively affects formal employment.

We solve the labor shortage in the industry to some extent with Syrians. While there is a prerequisite for Syrians such as working for 8 hours, Afghans work flexibly in animal husbandry and we are forced to use Afghan workers. Most Afghans cannot register officially. New legal regulations are needed to correct this situation, otherwise there will be serious problems in the agricultural sector (Local Government Representative).

As mentioned above, unregistered work has negative consequences for employers, employees and the state. Uninsured employees cannot benefit from many legal rights, and there are many administrative and judicial sanctions for employers. For the state, there is a loss of premiums and an increase in social security deficits (SGK, 2022).

We have problems with the insurance of Afghan shepherds in the field. We warn employers about this issue. Because when there is a work accident, this is easily covered by insurance. But when it is not, big problems arise. You need to get an exemption certificate for this. However, employees must be registered first. A doctor may not want to treat an unregistered person. When we encounter such unregistered people, we have to call the police and deport them. When issuing a work permit, at least MIT and the Ministry of Interior make decisions by looking at their records (Social Security Institution Representative).

Unregistered workers have a difficult treatment process in the hospital. Unregistered workers do not benefit from many legal rights. Since they are not covered by health insurance, they either do not receive treatment or they are treated at private hospitals at very high prices within the scope of the employer's initiative. When they become unable to work for any reason, they cannot benefit from disability pension, incapacity income in case of work accidents or occupational diseases. In case of occupational accidents, employers are under great financial and moral responsibility and face serious judicial, administrative and financial sanctions.

There were problems in accessing vaccines during the pandemic. We could not find a health worker for the agricultural worker who fell off the motorbike. We took care of the health service, which we would normally provide at a more affordable price, in a private hospital. If we had been fined, the minimum would have started from 40,000 TL (Representative of Karatay Chamber of Agriculture).

According to the International Labour Force Law, a foreigner whose work permit application is evaluated positively is granted a work permit for a maximum of one year in the first application (ÇSGB, 2022). The renewal of work permits for one year in the first application and two and three years in subsequent applications has created a burden for employers.

Conditions have changed, a general legislative work needs to be done. Exemption is granted, but this is valid for 1 year and must be renewed, which creates a burden. It creates a problem for the employer. The status of the identity card we issue does not replace this work permit. For others, it is necessary to go to the Ministry of Labour (Konya Provincial Migration Management Representative)

They do not want to be registered because it is more attractive or they may go to a more attractive place tomorrow. If they are registered, this

situation will be solved and the staff trained for the sector will not be lost for a long time. The first year is covered by the state, and if there is a private health condition, it is extended (Konya Provincial Migration Management Representative).

Failure to register asylum seekers poses a major threat to both the employee and the employer in the event of a work accident. Asylum-seekers, especially those working in rural areas, are always in the closest proximity of employers and are even seen as family members. Another risk is labour ethics and sustainability of work. The lack of a written contract between foreign nationals and employers makes it problematic for employees to quit work whenever they want or to work flexibly. Especially in many fields such as the use of agricultural machinery, the loss of trained asylum-seeker labour force disrupts the continuity of production for enterprises.

I need a man who knows how to drive a tractor. I need skilled people who can do all the work. When Afghans come, we teach most of the work ourselves (Member of Karatay Chamber of Agriculture).

We spend a year to teach them how to use the land, tractor and well. I have five Afghans working with me. I pay about 250 thousand liras to these men in 4 months so that they do not go elsewhere. If there are no Afghans, I will quit sheep farming in the morning. Because I have no chance to find a local shepherd. Something has to be done, whether a decision will be taken in the parliament or not (Representative of the Chamber of Agriculture).

Another issue emphasised by employers and common stakeholders in the sector is training and certification. There are some problems in the certification process after the training. Asylum seekers usually attend trainings only to receive the daily insurance wage and are not willing to receive a certificate. There are also problems such as the lack of involvement of relevant professionals in training programmes and random participation in trainings. This situation reduces the effectiveness of training programmes and prevents the targeted increase in productivity. The fact that the employees, whom they have trained and laboured for a long time, can quit their jobs at any time because they do not have a legal obligation, harms the employers and thus the sector. Because animal husbandry and agriculture is a living sector. When the irrigation, spraying, feeding and milking of the field are interrupted, great losses are caused. In this respect, the most important handicap of asylum-seeker labour force for employers is that a trained employee goes to another place or leaves the job arbitrarily. In addition, language teaching, learning subjects such as planting and irrigation used in the agricultural sector is time consuming and requires a certain amount of labour. Employers state that they pay wages even when there is no work in order to prevent the labourers from leaving and that they are worried that they will leave one day. As a matter of fact, as a result of the interviews, it was determined that asylum-seekers, who are seen as cheap labour force, do not take away the job opportunities of the local people, on the contrary, they close the gap in business lines that require unskilled labour (Koyuncu, 2019: 220).

4.3. Solution Suggestions Against Risks in Asylum Seeker Labour Force

The biggest problem of the agricultural sector is unregistered employment. Especially for the Afghan nationals working in agriculture to work in a registered way, the legal legislation should be revised at the level of access to work permits. The fact that temporary work permits are not limited to one year will provide convenience for employers and employees. In the absence of a work permit, there are financial sanctions for both foreign nationals and employers. Nevertheless, legal processes and cultural differences cause unregistered work.

We have also given identity cards to Afghans, but this identity card does not provide a direct right to work. Because of our law, we have to reject them if they come to work, maybe the legislation should be changed. When we interview and make a deportation decision, we have great difficulties for those who have settled here for family reasons. Our demand is for this to be

transformed into a more general legal framework (Konya Provincial Migration Management Representative).

Although Afghan nationals are important for the agricultural sector, the lack of a general legal framework to provide Afghans with the right to work, as stated by the officials of the Migration Administration, causes the rejection of the labour force needed to be used especially in the agricultural sector. In accordance with the principle of geographical limitation of the Geneva Convention signed by Türkiye in 1961, refugees from outside the member states of the Council of Europe are not considered refugees. In this sense, Afghans, who cannot be included in the scope of any status, are defined as irregular migrants or illegal migrants in popular parlance. In this sense, it is presented as a solution to be covered by a different status.

Regarding vocational training, especially shoemakers pay a certain amount of pocket money per day and courses are organised through National Education and Public Education with employment guarantee. For 90 days, we provide general health insurance plus pocket money. The next day, we told them to give us their ID cards and we will make them SSK, but there is not a single Syrian left. They do not want to be registered (Konya İŞKUR Representative).

This issue should stop being a political material. Many people work in agriculture, let's raise their living conditions including hospitals, sports centres, we give them extra salaries for 4 months, but they leave when they are given 3-5 kurus more salary. Let's direct those who are suitable for agriculture to agriculture and those who are suitable for industry to industry according to the jobs they do in their own countries. Let's make institutional co-operation. This sector should not collapse (Member of Meram Chamber of Agriculture).

Organisation of comprehensive vocational training programmes by local administrations and relevant institutions in order to increase productivity in areas where refugee labour force is employed will help to overcome the lack of knowledge and skills in agriculture and animal husbandry. It is stated that post-training certification will ensure more effective participation in the labour market. As a matter of fact, it is stated that orientation to sectors according to the nature of the work and labour force will increase productivity. In addition to these, it was emphasised that the standards of accommodation for asylum-seekers who do not reside with employers should be raised and asylum-seekers should be asked what they want for these standards. In addition, it was suggested that migration policies should be reviewed and it should be determined how much refugee labour force is needed in the agricultural sector.

When we travel in the field, we see how important accommodation is. Seasonal agricultural labour is a deep-rooted sector that is dealt with by different institutions and it should be gathered in one hand. Containers and laundries were built in the past, but the workers did not stay in these places and tents were more ideal. In this case, when something is done, the opinion of the people living there should be taken no matter what (Representative of Konya Provincial Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry).

I think that those who govern our country should prioritise the interests of the country and the immigration policy should be reviewed (Member of Meram Chamber of Agriculture).

When the statements of agricultural sector representatives are evaluated, the accommodation conditions of asylum-seekers are critical for agricultural productivity. As a matter of fact, considering the living conditions of asylum-seekers, they live under risk in terms of health (Küçükkendirci and Batı, 2020: 36). Since the refugee labour force is an area where various institutions are directly and indirectly related and intervene, a holistic approach to improving the living conditions of the refugee labour force is emphasised. It is considered as a basic requirement that all kinds of arrangements to be made on the asylum-seeker labour force in rural areas should be made in accordance with the needs and preferences

of those living there. Registering the migrant labour force and providing appropriate working conditions will both increase the welfare of the local people and increase the productivity in the agricultural sector.

CONCLUSION

Although Konya, the granary of Türkiye, has an important position in the sector, it is faced with a number of problems. Along with the main problem areas such as labour force, employment, young population turning to a different line of work from agriculture, migration, the sector has to cope with these problems and at the same time, it has to observe the tendency to maintain its current balance. As a matter of fact, agricultural production requires labour force through multidimensional processes such as planting, irrigation, spraying, harvesting and it is essential to close this deficit for the agricultural sector to be sustainable. In cases where it is not possible to meet the labour deficit with the existing local population, enterprises in the agricultural sector generally try to reach a balanced position by making use of asylum-seeker labour. However, there are problems encountered in the compulsory employment of this labour force without analysing its current situation and in the process after employment. Legal procedures, work permit periods, lack of vocational training, inadequacy of machinery and equipment, work ethics, access to health system, unregistered work, language barrier are the main problem areas for the continuity of this labour force. This situation, which affects registered labour and loyalty to the workplace, causes loss of time, energy and capital in the agricultural sector. As a solution to these problems, it has emerged that all public and private institutions and organisations that are directly and indirectly related to the refugee labour force in the agricultural sector should be in cooperation.

Prevention of unregistered employment is also an important issue for the employer. One of the biggest concerns of the employer is that the employee may leave the job without giving any information by receiving a more attractive wage offer due to the absence of an employment contract between the parties. This situation poses a serious problem for the employer because it is very difficult to fill the employment gap left by the worker in rural areas. In addition, due to the problem of unregistered employment, health problems and all health expenses of the workers are covered by the employer. Unregistered employment causes major problems for both parties, especially in work accidents, and does not allow the protection of the rights of employers and employees within the framework of the law. In this context, in order for refugees, especially foreigners of Afghanistan origin, to be able to work as registered labour force in agricultural sectors, the deficiencies of the current legislation on asylum seekers and migration policies such as work permits should be reviewed and eliminated and it is of great importance to take this issue into consideration when determining migration policies.

The information such as registry records and previous work experiences of asylum seekers, including Afghans and Syrians working in agriculture, should be shared. Thus, the employment of asylum-seeker labour force according to their skills and professional competencies will enable both the employer and the worker requesting a job to contribute to the economy without the need for a long adaptation process. In addition, refugee labour force should be informed about their wishes in the process of improving their living standards and they should be active in the process of solving the problems in employment. In the agricultural sector, it is observed that foreigners of Afghanistan origin are more preferred than foreigners of Syrian origin in terms of being compatible and reliable as well as being open to experience and knowledge transfer, work ethics, professional knowledge level and compliance with working hours. In this respect, it is very important that foreigners of Afghan origin are subjected to temporary protection status where they can take part in employment. In order for the refugee labour force to become more qualified and to have the necessary knowledge and equipment, it is of great importance to provide vocational training programmes, especially in the use of technology and other areas of need. In addition, informing both employers and the refugee workforce about working conditions, work ethics, legislation, responsibilities and social rights, and making them aware of new regulations will contribute to eliminating tensions as well as problems arising from victimisation and lack of information.

As a result, it has been determined that the asylum-seeking labour force working in the agricultural sector in Konya province is necessary for the sector. The study is the first research conducted from the perspective of local actors in Konya in the context of the role of asylum-seeker employment in the

agricultural sector, current risks and solution proposals, and the findings obtained will directly contribute to the field.

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