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## Immigrants' Access to Resources: The Case of Syrian Immigrants in Turkey

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### Abstract

Differentiation can arise in such issues as locational and cultural changes, employment, workforce, urban management and distribution of income under the influence of massive migrations in countries letting in migrations. Therefore, immigrants can easily be the subject of discrimination on the grounds that they give harm to the welfare of a country. The basic factor in immigrants' "isolation" with prejudice and discrimination is the thought that they grasp the job possibilities of native population and that they cause unemployment.

This study was conducted with the participation of immigrants who were actively available in business life at different times in the period between 2015 and 2018. The interviewees' work like ranged from paper collecting to farming work and service sector. The group interviewed

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was composed of men and women between 18 and 55 years old. The whole group came to Turkey due to the civil war in their country. The research findings were obtained through face-to-face interviews with the immigrants and then they were interpreted.

**Keywords:** *immigrant, Syria, resource, migration*

## Introduction

Migrations occur as a result of global problems such as economic crises, terror, civil wars, climate changes and ecological problems influencing humans in negative ways and diminishing the welfare of nations. Massive migrations affect the socio-cultural structure, demography and economy of cities deeply. Differentiation occurs in such issues as locational and cultural changes, employment, workforce, urban management and income distribution in countries allowing immigrants.

Immigrants are the people who are obliged to displace in the country they live generally due to wars or political forcing and who need all the help as being in the status of immigrants. They are put into a different category as immigrants because they have the risk of being oppressed or killed within the boundaries of the country they live in due to their identity. That is to say, they leave the region they live and begin to live in another region of the country, in an isolated region, in a camp or as isolated from administrative process as a result of wars, ethnical/religious conflicts and they are devoid of state protection and services. People who are displaced within a country are referred to as “internally displaced people” (IDP) in international literature (İçduygu, 2012, p. 45).

On the other hand, they also face discrimination on the grounds that they give harm to the economy of the country they take refuge in and are considered to be the causes of economic problems in the country. The main factor in the “isolation” of immigrants with prejudice and discrimination is the thought that they grasp the employment possibilities of the native population in the country they emigrate to and that they cause unemployment in the country and thus becoming the target.

However, being an immigrant means coming from somewhere else, “not being from here”, “being from there” and being both “inside” and “outside” (Chambers, 2005, p. 16-17).

Dense wave of migration from Syria has brought new problems to Turkey. Reactions to immigrants in Turkey are similar to the reactions to them in other countries letting in immigrants. The negative reactions to them sometimes turn to hatred. It is observed that the discourse of hatred can be easily blended with racism especially in that periods of crisis. prejudice is developed against

immigrants as a result of the prevalence of the view that they are in quest of the “marginal” since they cannot adjust to the regions they come to and since they have economic problems. It is the view signalling the danger that immigrants will set a cultural threat to the “natives” of the country they come and settle (Corliss, Curtis & Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 481-482).

Immigrants are often associated with crime. On evaluating the news in the mass media, immigrants are emphasised when they commit a crime but emphasis is not made when immigrants are not involved in a crime or when they are the victims in a crime (Bulut, 2017, p. 927-932). The ties between migration and crime have long been discussed in academic studies and in social policy applications. The ties between migration and crime is still one of the most frequently discussed subjects today. Yet, it cannot be said that a satisfactory answer has been found to the question of relationality between the two phenomena. Migration and crime are away from being considered as two static phenomena, and they both have complex and interwoven processes and there are several unanswered questions about the relationality between the two. The relationships between migration and crime is shaped by means of identifying patterns of relationships between criminality and immigration affecting each other in positive or negative ways.

We see that anger can easily turn into discourse of racism as a result of provocations caused by the fact that immigrants are considered as cheap work force in Turkey and by the belief that they cause increase in the price of houses, decrease in wages and unemployment risks caused by immigrant. While Syrian immigrants caused increase in the price of renting a house from the perspective of tenants, the increase in Syrians' demand for property turned into an opportunity for landlords in all the cities. In the cities on the borders, on the other hand, the price of food also increased in parallel to the increase in rent and it caused inflation above Turkey's average in those cities (Kilis, Hatay and Gaziantep).

This study was conducted with the participation of immigrants who lived in Dikmen and Karşıyaka districts of Ankara and who were actively available in business life at different times in the period between 2015 and 2018. It was also based on interviews with farming workers in İçel. The interviewees' work like ranged from paper collecting to farming work and service sector. The group of immigrants interviewed were between 18 and 55 years old. All of the group came to Turkey because of civil war in their country. The research was conducted through face-face-face in depth interviews. The interviews were voice recorded with the participants' consent. Yet, the interviews were recorded in writing in the case of interviewees who did not agree to voice recording. Thus, 22 male and female participants in total were interviewed.

## Migrations

Turkey has been the popular spot of “massive” migrations originating from neighbouring regions for over two hundred years. Migrations to the country started with Karlowitz Treaty signed by the Ottoman Empire in 1699. We see that migration movements are reversed in a sense when the Empire started to be defeated. When the life conditions deteriorated and when there was no security in the Balkans, migrations in reverse direction started. Migrations from the Balkans into the inner parts of the Ottoman Empire started with the Balkan War. Migrations from the Balkans, Crimea and Caucasia into the Ottoman empire started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Halaçoğlu, 1995). Migrations, densely

from the Balkans and Caucasia, continued in the Republican era (Doğanay, 1997). Immigrants coming from the Balkans settled in almost all country- mostly in Western Anatolia. The districts of Izmir were the places of dense settlement of Balkan immigrants (Ünal, 2012).

The massive migrations into Ottoman territories started in 1783 with the occupation of Crimea by Russia and continued by increasing throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A great number of people from Caucasia, Crimea and the Balkans took refuge in Ottoman territories beginning with the Crimean War. Balkan Wars also caused great masses to come into the Ottoman empire. Turkish Republic, which emerged as a nation state with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, was exposed to continuous movements of migration beginning with its foundation. Exchange of Turkish-Greek population, which occurred in the early years of the Republic, was the first great massive migration movement (Taşbaş and Çetin, 2018, p. 131-144).

Republic of Turkey has continued to receive migrations since its foundation. Massive migrations happened due to wars, violence and political pressures. Thus, Turkey has been influenced seriously by dense migrations. Turkey has been receiving migration from African and Asian countries as well as from Afghanistan and Iraq due to the circumstances in those countries.

Turkey is now on the way to become a “country of migrations”. Turkey, which has been exposed to several massive migrations because of its position, is no longer a “transit country” for immigrants but now it is the “target country” for them. It has been the country which does not only send immigrants but also let in immigrants since the 1980s. Law on foreigners and international protection, which was put into effect in this framework, contains articles indicating that legal immigrants can be permanent and that Turkey is on the way to be a “country of migrations” (İçduygu, 2013, p. 41).

Turkey lets in migrations from the USA, European countries, Russia and China in addition to countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mostly women migrate especially from former socialist countries because of economic reasons. Half a million Iraqi immigrated to Turkey and more people continue to immigrate due to the crisis which emerged in 1991.

Humans had to abandon their country in recent years because of the war and violence which occurred in Syria. According to Kap, Turkey granted “temporary protection status” to every Syrian who crossed the border with its “open door policy” (2014, p. 30-35). Thus, approximately three and a half million Syrians came to Turkey because of the civil war in Syria (UNHCR, 2016). Massive migrations started from Syria to Turkey in 2011. Some of the immigrants have been living in tent and container cities, and the remaining have been distributed to various cities in Turkey.

### **From Tents to Houses**

The immigrants who were in the groups to arrive first in Turkey were placed in old slums in Dikmen district of Ankara- which were evacuated for urban transformation. Some of the Syrian immigrants beginning to live in slums settled in camps in the border cities when they first came to Turkey. After living in the camps for a while, they went to Gaziantep and then to Ankara. After trying various ways to get a job, they started paper collecting with the help of a group called “people from Antep”. They said that they were fired from work without getting paid before starting paper collecting. The Syrians who have settled in the region call themselves Arab and Turkmen. The group, who had

worked as tailors and chauffeurs in Syria, were aged 20-30 on average. The majority of the people interviewed were married and had children. It was found that their father and mother continued to live in Syria. The place of settlement was generally chosen by means of immigrants or relatives who had formerly arrived. Women in the group living in Ankara/Dikmen, who were interviewed, did not work for a wage.

The owners of the slums took the advantage of the situation and began to demand rent from the Syrian immigrants who had settled in the slums which were empty. The houses the immigrants settled were worn out and they were repaired for a temporary settlement. The broken windows were replaced by cardboards and the locks in the doors were replaced by knots tied to the nails. It was found that the group sometimes received food support from supermarkets in the area in addition to their earning from paper collecting. The interviews made in 2015 demonstrated that children did not go to school. The group was found to have been given the job of paper collecting and to be protected by those who are known as "people from Antep". We can state that they obey the group known as people from Antep in return for protection. Yet the group interviewed could not be found when the researcher went to the same address two years later. The Syrian immigrants, who were in search of better conditions might have gone to another city or might have got another job.

The reason for why the settlers in Ankara/Yenimahalle/Karşıyaka chose the district was that the rent was cheaper in the area. They were found to have come directly from their country. The residence area- where approximately 1500 immigrants lived- was chosen with the help of those who had come here previously. The immigrants in the area were Arabs who had come from different cities in Syria and Turkmens who had come from Telafer. The groups settled in Karşıyaka were found to have come 2-4 years ago. It was found that children under age 16 went to school but that boys above age 16 worked in different jobs without social security and earned 1500 TL a month. The interviews showed that boys aged 14 and above supported the families who were interviewed. It was also found in this group that women did not work outside. Immigrants usually lived in two-room houses, and in each house 6-7 people lived. Immigrants from Telafer, who lived in the area, were in cooperation and solidarity. Accordingly, it was found that the aid given to the group was collected by an authority and was delivered to those in need.

The group in İçel lived in both houses and tents. Those immigrants, who earned their living by working in agriculture, did not have a constant place of residence. They come and go between cities according to crops harvested. It was found that accommodation was sometimes provided by employers. The Syrian immigrants who were between farming workers were found to have come to Turkey 1-5 year(s) ago. Each family in the group had seven children on average. They came to İçel after travelling to several cities to get a job to support them.

The places that Syrian immigrants live are closely associated with their class and economic position. 20% of probably the lowest income level immigrants lived in camps, the second lowest group lived in outskirts of cities and in rural areas (Lordoğlu, Aslan, 2016, p. 789-808).

### **Immigrants' Employment**

Immigrant employment is the major problem in Turkey. According to the data coming from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, applications were made by employers for work permit of

foreigners of 165 different nationalities in the first ten months of 2014 (Koç, M et al., 2015, p. 63-93). The issue of employment was densely brought to the agenda following the civil wars in Iraq and in Syria. Previously, several immigrants had come to Turkey from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkic republics and Africa. Currently, over three million immigrants coming especially from Syria face serious problems.

According to the official figures, Turkey- as a country hosting approximately three and a half million Syrians within the scope of temporary protection (Immigrants Association)- has the biggest load of immigrants in the world. It seems that it is a weak probability for the Syrians to return to their country in the short term. Except for the immigrant group of three thousand people living in camps, all the immigrants spread into the country and mainly into the South-eastern Anatolia. While some of them aim to take immigrant in the western countries, the majority consider Turkey as the place of settlement (Syrian interviewees). Immigrants have to work to lead a life. Therefore, the most important problem for Syrian immigrants is to get a job. According to Srur, it is very difficult for immigrants to integrate and to evaluate their cultural capital according to their qualities, but it needs to be expanded (2011: 251: 252).

### **Syrian Immigrants' Access to Business Life**

Turkish labour statistics show that the rate of unemployment is 9.1% and the rate of informal employment is 37%. Additionally, there are also Syrian immigrants who came to Turkey obligatorily. Syrian immigrants are hired with no social security and below minimum wage by many employers who see them as cheap labour (Bulut, 2014).

disadvantage caused by Syrians- who work as cheap workforce in industry, farming and small scale businesses- and the unfair competition caused by firms employing Syrian cheap labour in comparison to the firms not employing them are considered as economic risks that massive migrations from Syria to Turkey have led to.

With a regulation issued in 2016, Syrian immigrants' work conditions in Turkey were regulated and they were freed to work in seasonal agricultural jobs, and certain conditions were introduced for them to work in other areas. With the above-mentioned regulation, the employment problem of immigrants seems to be solved partially. Immigrants' participation in agricultural activities means that a part of Syrian workforce can be used. Yet, Syrian immigrants' getting a job in the area of agricultural activities causes uneasiness on the part of local agricultural workers. The local workers think that Syrian immigrants grasp their job because they are cheap labour. Besides, it was also found that workers' wages had not been raised for about eight years due to Syrian immigrants (interviews in Ankara and İçel).

It is known that Syrian immigrants contribute to manufacturing and trade through small businesses even though the number is small. Owing to the fact that most of those businesses do not fulfil such obligations as tax-paying because they are unlicensed, they are believed to create unfair competition. The situation causes increase in local tradesmen's reactions to Syrians. Syrian immigrants act as artisans in various branches of business- mainly in jewellery. People who go shopping to Syrian immigrants' places are again Syrians (interviews in Ankara/Sitelcer).

Beside tradesmen and workers in farming jobs, there are also immigrants who work informally. According to Bulut, Syrian workers are employed even in firms winning tender announced by governmental institutions. There are no policies in Turkey to protect the workforce of immigrants who are employed illegally. There are employers who wish to employ them just as there are immigrants willing to work at very low wages and illegally for obligation (Bulut, 2014).

### **Access to Jobs: Immigrant Workers**

It was found that immigrants, who had come to Turkey abandoning their country for obligatory immigration and built a new life, had access to jobs through other immigrants who had come formerly. It was found that the well-organised Turkmens who had come from Telafer and settled in Ankara/Karşıyaka were influential in access to jobs. Accordingly, ethnic networks were used by Turkmens to get a job. The researcher had the impression that Turkmens coming from Telafer had more expectations of Turkey than Arabs did. The group, who associated themselves with the same ethnic and religious identity as Turkish people, were observed to feel that they deserved more to live in Turkey than Arabs or member of other ethnic groups coming from Syria. They complained about not being cared and helped adequately despite sharing the same ethnicity. Women did not work in the group. The men who worked were found to believe that they earn less than local workers. They believed that they should be paid more because they did not have social security.

Official bodies in addition to ethnic networks were influential for immigrants working in agriculture in accessing to jobs. It was found through interviews that the male and female agricultural workers accessed to jobs in groups. The immigrant agricultural workers were generally in mixed groups of men and women. Those who could speak a bit of Turkish communicated with others. Immigrants did not have direct contact with the employer but they worked under the responsibility of mediators. Those people, who acted as mediators between agricultural workers and the employer, have the control.

Immigrants seem to solve their problems in part by getting a job. The majority of them believed that they earned less than the local workers. Immigrants having a regular job in Ankara complained about not earning the same amount of money as the local workers (interviews in Ankara and İçel). Despite the fact that the immigrants and the local workers earned the same amount of money in Ankara, the immigrants thought that the local workers were paid more because their social security was paid by the employer. In İçel also, the agricultural workers claimed that they earned less than the local workers. While in some cities the immigrant workers and the local workers earned the same amount of money, in some other cities the immigrants were found to earn less. Yet, the immigrants caused an important economic problem for agricultural workers. The fact that employees could find immigrants to employ at lower wages led to local workers' loss of their right to bargain and sometimes to loss of their job. Agricultural workers' daily wage have not increased since 2010 (interviews in İçel).

It was found that the Syrian immigrants who were the paper collectors in Ankara did not get their wages although they had worked in various workplaces. They got 21 TL (for one day) for collecting paper in 2010.

Of the immigrants, women and men with higher education were found to work as agricultural workers. They could not find jobs suitable to their education. It became apparent that the immigrants could not get jobs suitable to their educational background in many countries of the world as in Turkey and that they worked in jobs requiring lower level of education. Failure to access to jobs suitable to their qualifications is not the problem of only those who obligatorily migrate, but it is also the problem of immigrants with high qualities who are invited in the migration policies followed by countries to sustain their existence and to be powerful in international competition. Individuals with high qualifications, who are the attractive audience, can also be obliged to live under negative conditions in the countries they migrate into. They encounter great obstacles in continuing their career. Attracting workers with high qualifications into a country is almost an obligation for modern economies. Immigrants with high qualifications are the basic elements of the continuity of modern information societies. According to Nohl, it is mostly impossible for those countries to achieve success in the application even if they set the integration of immigrants into labour market as a target. Research conducted in relation to such immigrants demonstrates that there were great differences between immigrants' economic performance and their occupational success and local people. Therefore, immigrants who are invited to the country as well as those who migrate for obligatory reasons are also influenced by prejudices. Not only those who migrate but also the second-generation face inequality (2011, p. 12). Transitions during study and work mean the process of status distribution again. Bourdieu points out that individuals cannot use their cultural, economic and social capital sufficiently due to their status as immigrants (cited in Nohl, 2011, p. 74. Bourdieu, 1982).

### Isolating Immigrants

It is not easy to respond to the question that individuals with cultural capital are accepted in anywhere in the world and thus the "class" differences dominate the "race" differences- in Bourdieu's words. It was found that symbolic isolation of immigrants in Turkey, Canada and Germany is not displayed in the same sensitivity everywhere, and that it was not considered as a social problem (Hausen, 2011, p. 272-273). On the other hand, no comments were made on the ways of symbolic isolation specific to countries. It was found that cases of suffering from symbolic isolation and coping with it were related to immigrants' socio-economic status. It was also found that symbolic isolation could be coped with in the long terms when there were such developments as occupational achievement or marriage. Nevertheless, it is not right to associate the fact that those who improve their life conditions do not face symbolic isolation with those who cannot improve their life conditions (Ofner, 2011, p. 331, 332). Immigrants' efforts for acceptance or legitimating their recognition (Neumann, 2011, p. 316). Isolating the immigrants and anger towards them in Turkey are caused by increase in house rent with their arrival especially in border cities, by keeping daily wages low and by local agricultural workers' remaining out of agricultural activities.

The Syrian immigrants interviewed claimed that they were isolated. It was found in the interviews held in Içel that Syrian agricultural workers were not allowed to work with the local agricultural workers. Thus, it was found that they had no communication with their neighbours.

In this respect, the immigrants coming from Telafer and describing themselves as Turkmens said that they had not faced isolation. However, the wedding ceremony that immigrants coming from

Telafer and living in Ankara/Yenimahalle organised in their house received harsh reactions from a woman. Drums were not played the volume of the music was turned down and ceremony as not held out in the street. The guests danced in the house, but they encountered reactions. Despite this, they said that they did not encounter isolation. Probably, they did not perceive such reactions as isolation because they associated being Turkmen with Turkey and developed sense of belonging.

## Conclusion

Syrian immigrants live in both houses and tents. Their accommodation seems to be associated with their economic position. The places of settlement outside tents were chosen by means of previously arrived immigrants or relatives. The interviewees were found to live in the cheapest houses. They lived in 2-room houses and 6-7 people lived in each house. Agricultural workers generally lived in tents.

The great wave of migration from Syria into Turkey has introduced new problems- including getting a job. Some of the Syrian workforce solved their employment problem by participating in agricultural activities. However, their getting jobs in the sector of agriculture caused uneasiness on the part of local agricultural workers. In consequence, the local workers have strict reactions to the immigrants due to the fact that they are cheap workforce. It was also found that the Syrian immigrants contributed to trade through small scale businesses. yet, the fact that those businesses do not fulfil their liabilities such as tax paying is considered as unfair competition. Thus, it was found that especially local tradesmen had reactions to the Syrians. In addition to Syrians working in such jobs as trading and agricultural activities, there are also unlicensed Syrian workers. The Syrian immigrants spread all over the country, mainly into the South-eastern Anatolia. While some of them aim to take refuge in the western countries, the majority consider Turkey as the place of settlement. The most important problem for immigrants is to get a job. They usually get a job with the help of those who had come to Turkey formerly.

The immigrants' arrival caused increase in rents especially in the cities on the border, low daily wages and the exclusion of local agricultural workers from agricultural activities. Probably, all this caused the isolation of immigrants and anger towards them in Turkey.

The Syrian immigrants interviewed thought that they were isolated. It was found that the immigrants did not have communication in residence areas or in the areas they worked. Yet, Turkmens who had come from Telafer said that they were not isolated.

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