

The Role of Syrians in Konya's Industrial Sector: Experiences and Structural Challenges

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Konya Sanayi Sektöründe Suriyelilerin Rolü: Deneyimler ve Yapısal Sorunlar

Abstract

This study examines the integration of Syrian labour into the industrial sector of Konya, focusing on key structural challenges and opportunities. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilising semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders to gain insights into the impact of the Syrian workforce in Konya's industrial sector. The data were analysed using discourse analysis to capture the depth of these interactions. The findings indicate that while the Syrian workforce has significantly filled an employment gap within the sector, persistent structural issues, including unregistered employment, lack of work permits, professional ethics concerns, and work discipline, pose significant challenges.

Keywords : Konya Industrial Sector, Syrians, Labour, Employment, Structural Problems.

JEL Classification Codes : J61, J46, O15, Z13.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Suriyeli işgücünün Konya'daki sanayi sektörüne entegrasyonunu, temel yapısal sorunlara ve fırsatlara odaklanarak incelemektedir. Araştırmada, Suriyeli iş gücünün Konya sanayi sektöründeki etkilerini anlamak amacıyla nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, yerel aktörlerle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatlardan elde edilen veriler, söylem analizi yöntemiyle derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Suriyeli iş gücünün sanayi sektöründe ciddi bir istihdam açığını kapattığını, ancak bu süreçte kayıt dışı çalışma, çalışma izinleri, meslek etiği ve iş disiplini gibi yapısal sorunların üretim sürecindeki temel sorunlar arasında yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Konya Sanayi Sektörü, Suriyeliler, İş gücü, İstihdam, Yapısal Sorunlar.

1. Introduction

There are many studies in the international literature on how immigrants contribute to the economies of developing countries and the problems they face in labour markets. Early studies on the subject (Grossman 1982; Withers & Pope, 1985; Borjas, 1987; Murphy & Welch, 1989) provide valuable information on the effects of immigrants on wages and returns to capital. These studies concluded that immigrants contribute both to the local and the national economy and have minor adverse effects on the earnings of domestic citizens, concluding that the quantitative impact of this competition is insignificant.

Similarly, Weyerbrock (1995) uses general equilibrium models to study the effects of migration to the EU and states that labour migration to the EU does not have dramatic consequences for EU citizens to fear. He concludes that adverse effects, such as increased unemployment or decreased wages and per capita income, are relatively small even for large waves of immigration. As migrants increase their capital stock, the integration problem for the labour market gradually decreases, and it becomes socially acceptable. Weyerbrock, therefore, advocates making labour markets in the EU more flexible.

Boeri and Brucker (2005) reach similar conclusions in their analysis of the costs and benefits of East-West migration towards the enlarged EU. When labour markets are open, the gains are significant: migration of 1% of the population increases the GDP of the total EU region by about 0.3%. The studies by Keuschnigg and Kohler (2002), Heijdra et al. (2002) and Brucker and Kohlhaas (2004) provide very similar results on the impact of post-enlargement immigration for Austria and Germany. In all these studies, wages would fall by roughly 0.5%, and the GDP of the host country would increase after 1% of the labour force immigrated.

Gross (1998, 2002, 2004) uses this procedure to analyse the effects of immigration on the unemployment rate in France and Canada. His findings show that it is important to distinguish between short-run and long-run effects. In the short run, immigrants partially increase the unemployment rate. This effect is due to an increase in the duration of job searches rather than the displacement of local workers. In the long run, immigrants produce more job opportunities, and unemployment falls permanently.

There are many more studies on the subject in the international literature. In general, the effects of migration on national economies are analysed in terms of wage or employment effects on domestic workers, changes in technology and competitiveness, fiscal effects, housing prices, investments, migrant entrepreneurs, etc. In Türkiye, on the other hand, the literature focuses on asylum seekers rather than migrants. When we look at the related literature, it is seen that studies focusing on the labour market, wages and employment effects rather than the effects on the Turkish economy are predominant. Studies examining the effects of foreigners on the Turkish economy have primarily focused on Syrian asylum-seekers and have generally tried to analyse the effects of Syrians on labour markets through wages and employment. Most studies conclude that foreigners in general and Syrians in

particular positively contribute to the Turkish economy. Ceritoğlu et al. (2017) and Akgündüz et al. (2015) also examined the effect of migrants on employment using the difference of differences method. They concluded that migrants do not have an adverse effect on employment, and employment is not affected by migration. Aksu et al. (2018) find that the positive impact on formal employment offsets the adverse effects of migration on men's informal employment. In the informal sector, every 10 Syrians eliminates the jobs of four local men (including part-time jobs), all paid workers. In contrast, in the formal sector, every 10 Syrians creates jobs for roughly 5.5 local workers, of which approximately 3 are wage workers, 1.7 are self-employed, 0.54 are employers, and 0.35 are unpaid family workers. However, it is concluded that male employment is negatively affected, especially in the construction sector. Looking at the findings of Aksu et al., no negative impact of migration on men's wages in the labour market was found. Migration has a positive effect on men's wages in formal employment. Similarly, the wages of women and men increase in the formal manufacturing sector, and men's in the formal service sector. On the other hand, in sectoral terms, labour-intensive sectors (such as construction and agriculture) also have a negative impact on both men's and women's wages. Cengiz and Tekgüç (2021), on the other hand, conclude that informal jobs lower the average wages, but there is no loss of employment or wages for citizens holding less than a high school education; on the contrary, these people switch to formal employment. Accordingly, migrants/asylum-seekers increase the wages of local citizens.

In the literature, the participation of Syrians in the Turkish labour market has been discussed in a multidimensional manner in terms of its economic, social and cultural impact. The effects of these processes on the local labour force, the opportunities and threats they pose for the market, the challenges they face, income distribution, informal employment, unemployment rates, wages, working conditions and entrepreneurship have been among the frequent discussions. All these studies have shown that Syrians' participation in the labour force is not only an economic issue, but also closely related to social cohesion, social justice and policy-making processes. In particular, contrary to the perception that Syrians increase competition in the local labour market and threaten the job security of local people, it has the potential to close the labour shortage and contribute to economic growth (Arıcıoğlu et al., 2023; Dikkaya & Dinçer, 2023; Koyuncu, 2019; İşcan & Çakır, 2019; Aygül, 2018; Duruel, 2017; Kaygısız, 2017; Çetin, 2016; Dinçer et al., 2024; Pinedo-Caro, 2020; Vural, 2020). In particular, contrary to the perception that Syrians increase competition in the local labour market and threaten the labour-job protection of locals, they have the potential to close labour shortages and contribute to economic growth.

However, it is impossible to conclude the positive and negative effects of migrants/asylum-seekers on the economy in Türkiye. This is because there is no database to measure the impact. In this context, first of all, there is a need for a comprehensive database where many variables such as demographic characteristics of migrants such as gender, age, education level, occupation, occupational skills, sectoral distribution, labor force participation, real wages, wage rates, production, technology use, technology coefficients, skilled/unskilled labor, unemployment rates, rental rates, labor force participation, real

wages, wage levels, employment expectations, capital and labor inputs are available. The biggest obstacle to this is unregistered employment. The fact that the main emphasis in all studies on the economic impact of migrants in Türkiye is on informal employment supports this argument. For this reason, field research at the local level is extremely valuable. This study has the potential to make a unique contribution to the related field with a specific focus on Konya. In this context, although studies at the national level generally evaluate the effects of the Syrian labour force on the Turkish labour market, the analysis of local dynamics and how these dynamics are reflected in production processes in industrial-dominated regions such as Konya remains insufficient. In addition, when we look at the studies in the national literature, the vast majority of them focus on asylum seekers.

2. Current State of the Konya Industrial Sector

The industrial sector encompasses the transformation of raw materials and the construction of machinery and equipment, facilitating the formation of production activities. Each new production activity opens the door to emerging market networks and sectors, positioning the industry as a dominant force in the economic development of cities and nations. The sector’s production capabilities drive factors such as increased gross national product, the creation of new business lines, and economic growth and stability. Consequently, the industry contributes to the country’s development as an economic driver and promotes political stability and social order. In this context, Konya is significant in Türkiye’s economy due to its expanding industrial activities across various sectors and the employment opportunities it generates. The city’s industrial zones are primarily concentrated in the central districts of Selçuklu, Karatay, and Meram, alongside additional zones spread across other districts.

Konya, a key province contributing significantly to employment and industry within the Turkish economy, stands out with its extensive industrial infrastructure, including 12 organized industrial zones - 9 of which are currently active-18 small industrial sites supported by the Ministry, 29 small industrial sites in various districts, and 89 small and private industrial sites located in the provincial center (KTO, 2023).

Table: 1
Number of Workplaces and Employment in Konya Province Industrial Areas (2023)

Industry Types	Number	Number of Active Workplaces	Number of Employees
Organised Industrial Zones	12	1.874	71.295
Industrial Sites	123	19.189	123.423
Total	135	21.063	194.718

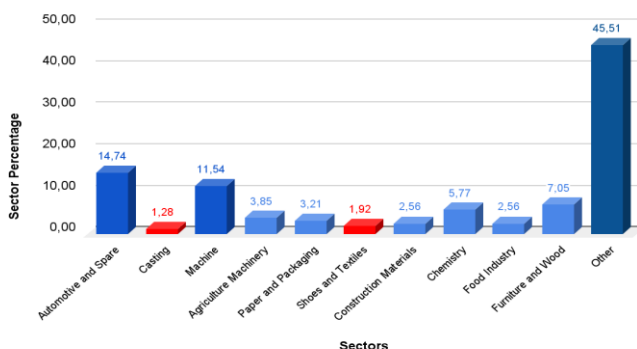
Source: Konya Chamber of Commerce, 2023.

Konya province holds substantial potential for workplaces and employment within its industrial areas. As of 2023, Konya comprises 135 industrial zones, 12 Organised Industrial Zones (OIZs) and 123 industrial sites. The Organised Industrial Zones host 1,874 workplaces, employing 71,295 people. Meanwhile, industrial sites have 19,189 active workplaces employing 123,423 people. Konya has 21,063 workplaces across its industrial areas, employing 194,718 individuals. These figures highlight Konya’s significant

employment capacity in the industrial sector and underscore the contribution of its industrial areas to the national economy. Although Organised Industrial Zones (OIZs) have fewer workplaces than industrial sites, they exhibit a high employment density due to larger-scale and labour-intensive production activities. In contrast, industrial sites encompass a more extensive network of workplaces, contributing significantly to total employment, albeit with lower labour intensity than OIZs.

The main sectors within Konya’s industrial landscape include automotive manufacturing and its sub-industries, agricultural machinery, chemicals, textiles, spare parts, iron and steel products, furniture, electronics, food, footwear, plastic products, packaging, and the paper industry. This diverse range of products facilitates domestic and international trade growth.

Graphics: 1
Konya Organised Industrial Zone Production Sectoral Breakdown (2023)



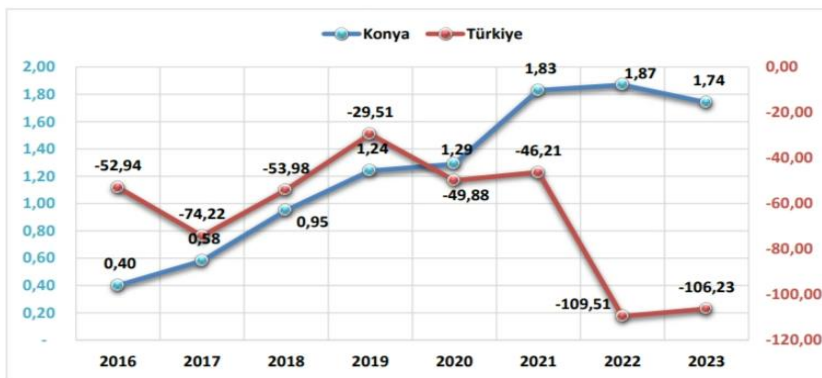
Source: Konya Chamber of Commerce, 2023.

The 2023 sectoral distribution data of the Konya Organised Industrial Zone (OIZ) highlight the concentration and diversity within various sectors of the industrial zone. The automotive and spare parts sector holds the largest share at 14.74%, followed by the machinery sector at 11.54%. These sectors are pivotal to the region’s industrial structure, as the production of high-tech and high-value-added products characterises them. This indicates that production activities in the area are heavily centred around the automotive, spare parts, and machinery industries. The furniture and wood sector accounts for 7.05%, while the chemical sector also plays a significant 5.77% share. The foundry sector holds a smaller share of 1.28%, and the footwear and textile sector is similarly limited, contributing 1.92%, indicating a relatively minor impact on the region’s overall production activities. Other sectors collectively account for a substantial share of 45.51%, reflecting the high diversity of sectors and the presence of numerous small firms operating within different industries in the zone. These data suggest that many of Konya’s industries are dedicated to high-value-added sectors like machinery and automotive. The industrial zone’s

concentration in technology-based sectors, focused on enhancing industrial production capacity, potentially positions it to boost its overall competitiveness.

Product diversity within Konya's industrial sector is crucial in developing domestic and international trade. Economic income generated from foreign trade is a key source of revenue for the national economy. In this context, imports and exports are of significant importance to states, as they are closely tied to the overall development levels of countries. Nations import goods they cannot produce domestically and require raw materials, while they export products and raw materials available within their borders. Consequently, producing and exporting surplus goods contributes to the inflow of foreign currency, thereby supporting the country's economic growth.

Graphics: 2
Foreign Trade Balance - Konya / Türkiye (2016-2023, Billion Dollars)



Source: Konya Chamber of Commerce, 2023.

The graph highlights Konya as a city that has consistently maintained a foreign trade surplus since 2016. Starting with a trade surplus of 0.40 billion dollars in 2016, Konya's surplus steadily increased, reaching 1.29 billion dollars by 2020. The city achieved its highest foreign trade surplus in 2021, amounting to 1.83 billion dollars, indicating a continuous improvement in production capacity and international competitiveness. In 2022 and 2023, Konya maintained surpluses of 1.87 billion and 1.74 billion dollars, respectively. This sustained performance underscores Konya's enduring success in foreign markets and highlights the robustness of its economic foundations.

In contrast, Türkiye has consistently experienced a foreign trade deficit since 2016. The deficit, which was 52.94 billion dollars in 2016, initially decreased until 2019 but surged rapidly from 2020 onward. By 2021, the deficit had reached 109.51 billion dollars and remained high, closing at 106.23 billion dollars in 2023. This persistent deficit is primarily driven by high energy imports and dependence on raw materials, which constitute significant inputs in Türkiye's production processes.

The contrasting foreign trade performances between Konya and Türkiye demonstrate that Konya has successfully distinguished itself from national trends. Konya's relatively lower exposure to energy and raw material dependencies and focus on enhancing local production capacity have enabled it to achieve a positive trade balance. These statistics reinforce Konya's position as a leading industrial region and suggest that its success could serve as a model for other areas, potentially contributing to reducing the national foreign trade deficit.

3. The Transforming Face of Employment in Industry: The Syrian Labour Force

Rising migration movements in the globalised world have reshaped labour market dynamics, extending beyond the scope of traditional neo-classical economic theories. Millions of individuals displaced by war, political instability, and economic crises are compelled to seek employment in their host countries to survive. While securing employment provides economic opportunities for migrants, it also significantly impacts the broader dynamics of destination countries and local labour markets. Migrant employment, particularly concentrated in the industrial sector, intensifies competition in local labour markets while addressing labour shortages.

The participation of asylum-seekers in the labour market presents both advantages and disadvantages for the economies of host countries and for the asylum-seekers themselves. While migration is often beneficial for skilled labour, it can pose challenges for unskilled workers. Nevertheless, host countries require both skilled and unskilled labour, prompting the development of various incentive policies to address these needs. Following the Second World War, industrialised European countries experienced substantial economic growth, driven by increasing industrial production, which amplified the demand for unskilled labour essential for post-war reconstruction. During this period, unskilled migration, actively sought and encouraged by host countries, significantly contributed to the industrialisation process and emerged as a cornerstone of economic development (Yardım, 2023: 189).

In labour-intensive sectors such as industry, employers perceive the labour supply of asylum seekers as a low-cost and flexible workforce, especially in countries where neo-liberal economic policies prevail. Asylum seekers often work in intermediary roles, particularly jobs less desirable to local citizens (Kalaycı & Civelek, 2021: 324). However, this situation can lead to adverse outcomes, including the growth of the informal economy, downward pressure on wages, and heightened social and economic competition between the local workforce and asylum seekers.

The integration of asylum-seekers into the labour market is often restricted to low-skilled and precarious employment, which limits their opportunities and exposes them to numerous challenges, including a lack of social capital, language barriers, uncertain legal status, social prejudices, and discrimination. These factors hinder asylum-seekers from

securing stable employment and participating fully in social life (Güler, 2015: 177; Jain & Hassard, 2014). This research examines Syrians' employment processes, obstacles, and the broader impacts of these dynamics on host societies.

In March 2011, a civil war erupted in Syria, forcing millions to flee their homeland and resulting in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. During this period, Syrians who arrived in Türkiye under an open-door policy (Koyuncu, 2014) were initially regarded as guests with the expectation that they would return once the war ended. However, thirteen years have passed since the onset of the conflict. Due to the geographical limitations outlined in the 1951 Geneva Convention, Syrians could not be granted refugee status in Türkiye. Instead, they were given temporary protection status, turning their guest status into prolonged uncertainty. Amid this uncertainty, many Syrians began working in various segments of the labour market in Türkiye to sustain themselves, leading to significant impacts on the labour market. Konya province, in particular, has been notably affected by this shift. Of the 3,097,660 Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye, 120,792 reside in Konya (GİB, 2024). This considerable population has reshaped local labour dynamics in Konya, creating new opportunities and challenges for locals and Syrians alike.

Syrians in Konya are predominantly active in sectors such as shoemaking, furniture, metal, and casting, making significant contributions to industrial production. Syrians fulfil labour demands in small and medium-sized enterprises, supporting increased production capacity and sectoral growth. Their involvement in the industrial sector addresses labour shortages, strengthens the local economy, and sustains production processes. Thus, Syrians play a critical role in the sustainability of the regional economic structure. This importance is highlighted in the "Research on Determining the Economic Potentials and Cooperation Opportunities of Syrian Guests in Konya," conducted with the Mevlana Development Agency's (MEVKA) support. The study revealed that nearly all businessmen in the relevant sectors acknowledged the critical role of Syrians, stating, "If it were not for the Syrians, at least 80% of the workshops here would be closed" (Topçuoğlu et al., 2015: 98). This statement underscores the significant impact of Syrians in addressing the labor shortage in the region's industrial sector.

4. Methodology

The qualitative research method was used in this study to understand and make sense of the effects of the Syrian labour force in the industrial sector in Konya and the perception of local actors towards this process. As it is known, the qualitative research method enables a detailed and in-depth examination of social events and phenomena and provides a deeper understanding of perceptions. In particular, it is an approach to make sense of people's experiences and semantic worlds reflecting how they understand the social reality (Neuman, 2014: 20-23; Erdoğan & Uyan-Semerçi, 2021: 157-171). The semi-structured interview technique was used as a data collection tool. The reason for preferring the semi-structured interview technique is to derive new questions when it is necessary to obtain more in-depth information about that question based on the answer to the question asked. It has the

flexibility to change, expand, or deepen the questions to align with the answers given by the participant. This enables the interview to progress dynamically and the participant to provide more detailed and rich information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Longhurst, 2010; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this context, the information to be provided by the research participants reveals the need to expand new questions in line with the context flow.

Interview participants were selected from local actors who directly or indirectly influence Syrian employment in Konya, have observed the integration process, are familiar with the local labour market, and can assess the impact of the Syrian workforce on this market. Participants included representatives from the Konya Chamber of Commerce, Konya Chamber of Industry, Konya Provincial Directorate of the Social Security Institution, Konya Chamber of Commerce Vocational Training Directorate, Konya Chamber of Turners, Welders, and Auto Repairers, Konya Meram Public Education Directorate, Konya Furniture Manufacturers Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen, the Konya Union of Chambers of Tradesmen and Craftsmen Training Coordinatorship, civil society organizations, and business people employing Syrians. A total of 20 interviews were conducted using purposive sampling, selecting participants with the relevant knowledge and experience needed to assess the impact of the Syrian labour force on Konya's labour market.

Each interview was conducted using a set of predetermined questions, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes on average. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and documented. The data were then analysed by identifying frequently repeated topics, from which initial codes were generated. These codes were subsequently grouped into thematic categories. Once the codes and themes were organised, the data were evaluated using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis treats discourses as language practices involving the speaker and listener, emphasising the linguistic processes that become actions influenced by ideology, knowledge, dialogue, expression, statements, negotiation, power, and the exchange of power. While theoretical approaches to discourse often treat it as text, practical approaches consider it as the exchange of meanings in interpersonal interactions (Sözen, 1999: 20). Discourse plays a crucial role in constructing social life, reinterpreting the world, forming ideological structures, and reshaping social relations, thereby holding significant importance in sociology (Bal, 2013: 258). In this context, discourse analysis is suitable for conducting sociological analyses of language practices.

The data were categorised according to identified problem areas, resulting in key themes, including Syrian labour in production, issues of unregistered work and work permits, professional ethics and work discipline, vocational training, and language barriers. This thematic classification facilitated an in-depth understanding of the impact of the Syrian workforce on Konya's industrial sector. It provided insights into the perspectives of local actors on this process.

5. Industrial Production and Syrians in Konya: Impressions and Problems

5.1. Inclusion of Syrian Labour Force in Production

Forced displacement has emerged as a significant global issue, with one critical aspect being the impact of migrants on the labour force in host countries and the effects of their participation in economic life. Following the onset of the civil war, Syrians who migrated to Türkiye began participating in specific areas of the labour market as a livelihood, leading to notable changes in the labour dynamics. This shift has particularly affected the labour market in Konya, reflecting broader regional and national trends.

"There were 45 thousand Syrians in Konya in 2015 and around 120 thousand today. This situation has naturally affected Konya's investment and employment rate, which has historically been a province that gives migration rather than receives it. Although it is often thought that they will increase unemployment, the benefits of migration have been overlooked and underemphasized... Considering the increase in the export potential of sectoral diversity, the role of Syrians in addressing the labour shortage should not be forgotten." (Representative of Konya Chamber of Commerce)

Historically, Konya has been defined as a city of emigration, but the recent influx of Syrians has transformed it into a city of immigration. This shift has altered the city's demographic structure and significantly impacted its population growth. Sociologically, such demographic changes can lead to substantial transformations in social structures and perceptions of identity. In relatively homogeneous regions like Konya, rapid population shifts can potentially create tensions within the local community, often fostering a division between "us" and "them". The impact of migrants' participation in the labour market on investment and employment rates is widely debated in migration literature. To understand the influence of Syrians on the industrial sector, it is particularly noteworthy that their temporary returns to Syria during Ramadan and Eid al-Adha have led to noticeable slowdowns in the sector (Arıcıoğlu, 2023: 253). The common belief that Syrians will increase unemployment often reflects local concerns about job security. However, as highlighted by the participant, the potential contributions of Syrians to the local economy are frequently overlooked.

"Most registered and unregistered Syrians in Konya are employed in shoemaking, furniture, metal, and casting sectors. Generally, businesses express satisfaction with employing Syrians, as they address a significant labour shortage. Although some business owners express reluctance to hire Syrians on a larger scale, these views are isolated and represent a minority. There is also a discourse about competition between Syrians and Turks; however, the reality is that many Turks are not inclined to take on these jobs. Employers prefer to hire Turkish workers when possible, but Turkish youth often avoid physically demanding jobs that require craftsmanship. Certain occupations are at risk of disappearing, with nearly 40% of workers in shoemaking being Syrians, and similar rates in other sectors. Syrians not only fill

critical labour gaps but are also essential for the sustainability of many industries. A sudden mass return of Syrians would likely cause significant disruptions, potentially leading to a collapse in the industrial sector." (Representative of Konya Union of Chambers of Konya Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

"There are 120 thousand people registered under Temporary Protection. In certain sectors of Konya's industry, Syrians play a crucial role in closing the gap for intermediate staff: 18% in shoemaking, 8% in foundry and welding, 35% in construction, 15-17% in textile and furniture, and 8% in automotive. Among working Syrian women, 85-90% are employed as hairdressers, while the remaining 10-15% work in industry and textiles." (Member of the Board of Directors, Konya Chamber of Industry)

It is important to note that the variations in reported rates of Syrian employment across sectors are primarily due to the prevalence of unregistered work, meaning that the figures cited are often based on observations rather than official data. Nonetheless, all participants agreed that Syrians are predominantly employed in sectors that require low-skilled or unskilled labour, roles that are generally difficult to fill by the local workforce. This insight is crucial for understanding the positioning of Syrians within the labour market and their broader place in social stratification. Syrians are frequently relegated to unskilled, less prestigious and lower-paid intermediary positions. While this positioning presents economic disadvantages for Syrians, it is vital for addressing local labour shortages and sustaining the economy. Other studies indicate that Syrians fulfil the demand for unskilled labour, particularly in seasonal sectors less favoured by Turkish workers, enabling these industries to operate at full capacity. Additionally, the employment of Syrians in low-skilled jobs has created opportunities for local workers to secure higher-status and better-paid positions within these sectors (Koyuncu, 2019). The data gathered from the interviews corroborate these findings.

It is reported that 85-90% of working Syrian women are employed in more traditional roles, such as hairdressing, while the remaining are engaged in the textile sector. This distribution highlights that gender plays a significant role in labour market segmentation, with women predominantly concentrated in specific sectors. According to Caro (2020: 8), although cultural factors contribute to the low employment rates among women, current working conditions are also unfavourable. Informal labour relations tend to exclude women from the workforce over time, and the demanding working hours typical of jobs held by Syrians often hinder women from achieving a work-life balance. Additionally, the high number of children among Syrian families further restricts women's participation in the labour market.

5.2. Unregistered Work and Work Permit Problem

A work permit is the official authorisation required for foreigners to work legally in Türkiye, as Law No. 6735 on International Labour Force stipulates. Syrians can apply for a work permit at least six months after their temporary protection registration date (T.C. Resmi

Gazete, 2016). However, a 10% quota is imposed when issuing work permits to Syrians, aimed at protecting employment opportunities for Turkish citizens (Türk-İş, 2019: 22). Notably, this quota does not apply to unfilled vacancies or to jobs that Turkish citizens are unwilling to take. This regulatory framework seeks to balance the integration of Syrian workers into the labour market while minimising potential negative impacts on local employment.

Syrians registered in Türkiye for at least six months are eligible to work in a workplace upon their employer's request, provided they receive 1/2 or 2/3 of the minimum wage. Although this regulation is intended to support the economic integration of Syrians in Türkiye and facilitate their legal employment, it has not had the anticipated impact on reducing unregistered work among Syrians (Arıcıoğlu, 2023: 250). As a result, unregistered employment remains prevalent.

"Working within the borders of the Republic of Türkiye is a constitutional right. Everyone who works must be registered and have social insurance. Most people we interviewed say they do not intend to leave. For some employers, having unregistered workers might seem more advantageous, but the state is actively trying to prevent this to avoid unfair competition. Work accidents and occupational diseases are unavoidable risks. If workers leave after 5-10 years, they are entitled to their constitutional right to compensation. In Konya, there is a project with the ILO called the 'Transition to Registered Employment Project,' which we have promoted by visiting chambers. We provide incentives to employers who hire registered workers. We provide 1,250 TL per person for every registered Syrian worker to support an equal number of Turkish workers. For instance, this support applies if an employer has a quota of 5 Syrians and 5 Turks, totalling 10 people. This is a temporary measure, and the money is deposited into the employer's account, usable as they wish, for 6 months." (Representative of Konya Provincial Directorate of Social Security Institution)

As highlighted by the participant, the statement "working within the borders of the Republic of Türkiye is a constitutional right" underscores that employment is a fundamental human right, while the assertion that "everyone who works must work in a registered way and have social insurance" reflects the clarity of the legal regulations surrounding this issue. However, the participant's remarks suggest this legal framework is not fully enforced. According to Caro (2020: 17), unregistered employment is prevalent among Syrians not registered with the Turkish Social Security Institution (SSI). Employers often favour unregistered employment because it reduces costs, as they are not required to pay social security premiums.

The cooperation between the Social Security Institution (SSI) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to promote registered employment highlights the importance that both the state and international organisations place on this issue. Despite these efforts, unregistered work remains prevalent. Projects targeting migrant groups, particularly Syrians,

aim to equip them with vocational skills and facilitate their transition into formal employment. While the SSI provides incentives to encourage registered work, employers often remain passive, and as a result, these initiatives have not achieved the desired level of adoption in the field. Additionally, it is not only employers but also employees who tend to be more accepting of unregistered work arrangements within the labour market.

"How do we change the informality of these people's work? How many of them are insured? This situation leads to the violation of rights and exploitation of these individuals. There are many undocumented Afghans and Syrians. These people need to be identified first and then employed in areas where they are needed. If there is a fatal accident, how will the employer protect themselves? We must also consider why these people risk their lives to reach Europe. The moment they arrive there, they are registered and recognised. Those who go to Germany can visit their family and friends after five years, but those who remain here cannot even visit their mother in Istanbul." (NGO Representative)

The participant's question, "How many of them work with insurance?" underscores the widespread nature of unregistered employment. The emphasis on the violation of workers' rights and their vulnerability to exploitation highlights that unregistered employment is not only an economic issue but also a significant social problem. In the case of a work accident involving an unregistered worker, employers can evade legal responsibility. According to the research findings, the root cause of unregistered employment is not solely driven by employers' preferences. Due to their low income, some Syrian workers prefer to work informally to avoid deductions from their wages for social security premiums. Syrians aiming to maximise short-term earnings often perceive insurance deductions as a financial loss, incentivising employers to continue informal hiring practices. Additionally, due to their uncertain legal status and future concerns, many Syrian workers do not prioritise the long-term benefits of social security. Therefore, informal employment is not merely a result of employers' cost-cutting strategies; it also reflects workers' choices. This dynamic suggests that informal employment is a structural issue shaped by employers' and employees' mutual interests and expectations.

5.3. Professional Ethics and Work Discipline

The labour market experience of Syrians is characterised by instability, with frequent job transitions. However, over time, Syrians are expected to adapt and learn the dynamics of the Turkish labour market. Evidence supports this trend; data from 2017 indicate an improvement in job stability compared to 2015 (Caro, 2020: 9-10). Differences in work discipline between Syrians and Turks can be attributed to variations in working hours, occupational practices, and daily life routines prevalent in Syria.

"People from Syria are less disciplined, and the burden for local firms to employ them formally is the same as for other workers. So why would they hire someone with less work discipline? We interviewed 3,000 people in the neighbourhoods, and only

300 were placed with vocational training certificates. Tradesmen do not see the advantage of employing Syrians; why should they give up on locals if they pay the same price?" (Representative of the Konya Chamber of Commerce)

Work discipline varies according to the geographical and economic conditions of the society where individuals live, forming the basis of differences between Turkish and Syrian workers. Given that Syria is located in a hot climate zone, the participant's statements about work discipline gain context when considering how working hours can be influenced by temperature. Often overlooked by employers, this factor complicates direct comparisons between Turkish and Syrian work habits. From the perspective of Syrian workers, it is important to recognise that their move to Türkiye involves adapting to a new country and different climatic conditions, which affect their work behaviour and discipline.

"There are notable challenges concerning Syrians' adaptation to work discipline. When the number of Syrians in a workplace exceeds that of Turkish workers, it often leads to issues and the formation of distinct groups. For example, if one Syrian employee is dismissed, nine might quit in solidarity. Additionally, if a neighbouring business offers slightly higher wages, even as little as 50 liras more, Syrians leave immediately. Moreover, providing insurance can be perceived as an added financial burden under these circumstances." (Businessman)

"I cover all the expenses, and 15 days later, he leaves, leaving me with the costs I've incurred." (Businessman)

Syrian workers are often reported to struggle with adapting to work discipline, leading to the formation of ethnic or cultural groupings within the workplace. This highlights the challenges of managing a diverse workforce. Sociologically, ethnic grouping occurs when workers from similar backgrounds form solidarity groups to create a sense of security in the workplace. However, these groupings can negatively affect overall workplace harmony and discipline. Additionally, frequently changing jobs in search of better economic opportunities is viewed as contrary to professional ethics. This behaviour, often employed as a survival strategy amid economic uncertainty, hinders Syrian workers from achieving stability in the labour market. The tendency of insured workers to leave their jobs soon after being hired imposes an economic burden on employers, contributing to insecurity.

"We applied for a work permit, but he did not show up for 3-5 months; we employed him without insurance, but this problem has been resolved. We are hesitant to start many insurance contracts because they often don't return for 2-3 months when they go to their country during holidays. Many left their families behind and came here to avoid military service, as they are conscripted regardless of age. In Konya, we are doing our best; we train Syrians and Turks in five fields. We have solved many issues related to intermediate staffing and directed workers to where needed, without room-to-room distinctions. Working hours are set for Syrians, and while they occasionally cite the heat as a reason for a lack of discipline, they are adapting. We have accepted them and employ them as refugees and fellow Muslims, and we continue to employ

them." (Representative of the Konya Furniture Manufacturers Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

Professional ethics and work discipline are directly linked to work efficiency. Working beyond regular hours and during holidays poses significant challenges for employers. Workplaces employing Syrians often report concerns about irregular working conditions, which creates uncertainty. Employees are left wondering whether workers will show up and how to address labour shortages when they do not. The disparities in work discipline between Turkish and Syrian workers further complicate the situation. Additionally, the frequent job changes among Syrian workers disrupt workplace continuity and stability. Employers who invest in training their workers often do not see a return on their investment, leading to financial losses. These issues compound other challenges within the sector, highlighting the need for solutions to maintain order and efficiency.

5.4. Vocational Education and Language Problem

The continuous rise in technology within the industrial sector significantly impacts economic processes and the labour market. As quality and skills become increasingly important in producing goods and services, unqualified labour is marginalised, making it a disadvantaged group within the sector. This disadvantage affects both the local and foreign labour forces, including Syrians. The lack of qualifications, coupled with challenges such as registration as a Syrian, low education levels, difficulties in adapting to staff and workplace culture, language barriers, and issues with professional ethics, exacerbates the already disadvantaged position of these workers. These factors collectively hinder the development of the industrial sector.

According to employers, the participation of Syrians in the Turkish labor market is contingent on legal regulations, language proficiency, and vocational training (Kaygısız, 2017: 15). The 2019 report by Turkish Trade Unions emphasizes the need for conducting needs analyses and creating vocational skills profiles to identify the sectors where migrant workers can be employed based on their existing skills, as well as the areas where their entrepreneurial potential can be harnessed. However, as of 2022, it is evident that these issues remain unresolved.

"There is no binding obligation. So there should be compensation if those who come for training do not enter employment. We are not saying that none are interested; some are very eager and demand more. For instance, in inventory management, if we could select 30 people out of 150-200, we would know who is committed to working. This morning, we received letters of commitment from six companies for the employment of the trainees. We hope we will not be disappointed. We need to conduct the training properly and gather sufficient information for effective interviews; we rely on information from associations." (Vocational Training Representative, the Konya Chamber of Commerce)

As in other sectors, the industrial sector faces challenges due to insufficient data on the Syrian labour force. Specifically, there is a lack of information regarding the sectors in which Syrians were employed before arriving in Türkiye, leading to inefficient vocational training and resource allocation. According to Akcan (2018: 71), identifying and matching skilled individuals with suitable jobs would mutually benefit employers and employees. Therefore, the role of non-governmental organisations in providing information about Syrians with skills or qualifications in any universal field is crucial for the Turkish labour market.

"There is no available information or inventory on the Syrian workforce, even in Konya. When we approach the Migration Administration for data on recruiting individuals for training, they refuse to share information. As a result, we seek assistance from organisations like Kızılay, Mahir Eller, and Elbir. However, we still struggle to obtain the necessary data, and these same organisations later request lists of those we have trained. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive information system that allows us to easily identify and recruit suitable candidates through interviews. Currently, we hire everyone without selection. The machines used in the industrial zone are highly valuable, worth millions of TL, and to operate them effectively, workers need to read, understand instructions, and communicate clearly with their trainers. When we cannot select candidates through interviews and end up training those we find without proper assessment, we fail to achieve efficiency in CNC and machine operator training programs. It simply does not work. For example, Çeliker Agriculture invested significantly in training, but we could not hire a single employee from those trained." (Vocational Training Representative, the Konya Chamber of Commerce)

The participant highlighted the lack of adequate information flow, which impedes accurate assessments of Syrians' competencies in the labour market. This gap makes it challenging for industrial organisations to find qualified personnel, resulting in significant costs. As noted, the effectiveness of training processes designed to equip personnel for operating high-value machinery is compromised by the inability to identify suitable candidates during recruitment. A comprehensive information system is needed to facilitate the training and integration of Syrians into the labour market, and this system should be accessible to employers, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. A direct connection between training and employability must be established to ensure a skilled workforce, supported by a more systematic and structured interview and assessment process. The example cited in the interview underscores the financial losses caused by mismanagement of this process, reflecting the inefficacy of training programs and the substantial waste of resources. Moreover, there is a growing concern that, in the long run, the local industry may become dependent on this labour force.

"Qualified personnel are crucial in the industry, but currently, we are forced to place unqualified individuals in front of the machines out of necessity. I wish they were qualified. Vocational training and certification are therefore very important in this

context." (Education Representative, Konya Union of Chambers of Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

"In 2018, we started collaborating with the ILO and purchased machines. We launched our courses to include 2 Syrians and 1 Turkish participant. We also have a new project with the EU. A total of 12 courses were opened, and 250 trainees completed the training. Of these, 180 received certificates, and 120 were placed in businesses. We insured each trainee and provided a daily wage of 70 TL. However, some trainees did not attend regularly or dropped out. In our sector, we have both qualified and unqualified Syrians, and currently, 40% of the workforce in our sector consists of Syrians." (Representative of the Konya Mobilyacılar Chamber of Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

Technological machines used in the industrial sector to enhance productivity require specific knowledge and skills. Training programs are implemented to address this gap. Thus, the industrial sector's development relies not only on mechanisation but also on workforce quality. This indicates that the sector invests significantly in both machinery and human capital. However, when the workforce's expected efficiency level is not achieved, these investments risk becoming unproductive, leading to financial and time losses.

"Our shopkeepers struggle to find employees to train. Syrians understand the difficulties we face when they do not work. We would be honoured to train Syrians. Thankfully, there is no age limit at the apprenticeship training centre. I explained that they can attend an apprenticeship school for one day and be employed with insurance. Still, they do not want to work. We will depend on them in the future because our children are unwilling to do hard labour. Syrians are not taking anyone's job; it's just that our children don't want these jobs." (Representative of the Chamber of Turning, Welding and Auto Repairers)

The reluctance of Syrians to work and the unwillingness of the local workforce to engage in heavy labour negatively impact employers' efforts to find and train qualified personnel. As the participant noted, the disinterest of local youth in such demanding jobs heightens the dependency on Syrian workers in the industrial sector. However, this growing reliance may also result in imbalances in the labour market and pose employment challenges in the long term.

"A project was implemented in 2019 where participants were kept in the institution for 4-5 months (508 hours) with a daily allowance of 55 TL. We had discussions with those in the shoemaking sector, and they offered job guarantees to every trainee; we even invested 7 million TL. We also proposed opening a course with an employment guarantee and addressed their lunch and transportation issues when they started work. Despite all these efforts, we could not employ them. When we send them to the company, they don't go. They only come to receive the 55 lira allowance. Their main concern is to get by day-to-day, not to learn a profession. They live dependent on aid

and view this project through the lens of welfare, not vocational training.”
(Representative of Konya Meram Public Education)

Including individuals without vocational training or sufficient knowledge, especially in the absence of proper participant screening, can hinder the effectiveness of training projects. When participants view the training as a form of temporary aid and engage primarily to receive allowances, the impact of the programs diminishes. This superficial interest often results in irregular attendance and premature dropout before obtaining certification. Even though participants are aware of significant opportunities, such as job guarantees upon certification, their motivation to complete the training remains low. Additionally, some groups participate in these projects solely for the per diem benefits, frequently shifting from one project to another, which diverts resources away from the intended target groups. This practice undermines the efficiency of vocational training initiatives and prevents the most deserving individuals from accessing these opportunities. To achieve more effective and sustainable outcomes, vocational training projects must implement a more rigorous participant selection process, establish a comprehensive inventory system, and enhance motivation for genuine engagement in the training programs.

The language barrier is one of the most significant challenges Syrians face in the workforce. Language proficiency is crucial for occupational safety and the proper use of technological machinery. Inability to read warning signs in factories poses serious safety risks, while the incorrect operation of expensive machinery due to language misunderstandings imposes an economic burden on employers.

“Turkish is very important for us. If he is going to work here and stay here, he has to learn it.” (Representative of the Konya Chamber of Mobilyacılar Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

“There is still resistance to learning Turkish among some of them, and the state policy is too lenient. They need to be able to read the signs in hazardous jobs.”
(Education Representative, Konya Union of Chambers of Tradesmen and Craftsmen)

Language learning is crucial to integrating Syrians into the Turkish labour market. For those working and planning to permanently reside in Türkiye, learning Turkish is essential for their daily and workplace productivity. This is especially important for individuals in hazardous jobs, where reading signs and instructions is vital for occupational safety and efficiency. In this context, Turkish language training should be considered necessary for workplace health and safety. Therefore, language training must be prioritised and integrated comprehensively into state policies to support the integration process of Syrians. Without addressing the language barrier, serious issues may arise in the labour market and the broader social integration process.

6. Concluding Remarks

Konya's industrial sector is crucial in Türkiye's production capacity and economic development. With the forced migration mobility in the last decade, Syrians' increasing presence in this sector has brought about a remarkable socio-economic transformation. Especially in the heavy industry sector, where Turkish citizens do not want to work, Syrians have been employed in sectors requiring low qualifications and have provided short-term solutions in the supply of the labour force needed by the sector. This has made the structural problems of the labour market more visible. While the intensive employment of Syrians in areas such as shoemaking, furniture, casting and metalworking has ensured production continuity, it has also brought the position and vulnerability of Syrian labour to the agenda. Although this contribution is ostensibly positive, problems such as unregistered employment, occupational incompatibilities, language barriers, and work discipline have weakened integration processes in the sector.

Unregistered work has become a systematic problem that restricts employees' access to fundamental rights and causes employers to postpone their legal obligations. The limited duration of Syrians' work permits due to their "temporary protection" status, the slowness of bureaucratic procedures and the attitudes of some employers neglecting legal regulations have turned informality into a structural form of employment. This situation has led to serious problems in some areas such as labour security, access to health services and social protection. The fact that Syrians go to their countries during holidays and the irregularity of their return periods make it even more difficult to ensure stability in the sector. Encouraging formal employment is an inevitable priority to prevent unregistered work. In this context, developing incentive mechanisms such as tax exemptions and insurance support for employers and providing Syrians with longer-term, flexible, and transparent work permits are structural steps to reduce unregistered work.

Employers' rapid and unqualified employment of Syrian labour leads to decreased production process productivity and an emerging need for qualification regulations at the sectoral level. The lack of an inventory of information on workers and the failure to record their previous experience increase the misuse of resources and lead to strategic mistakes in labour force planning. At this point, there is a need for a data system where the sectoral competencies of Syrian workers are measured, recorded and matched with labour force needs within the framework of a holistic employment policy.

With a view to the participation of Syrians in the local labour market being more productive and sustainable, comprehensive language training, vocational qualifications, and training programmes on professional ethics should be implemented. Such programmes would facilitate adaptation to the technical equipment and production technologies used in the industrial sector and strengthen adaptation to the Turkish work culture and discipline. It will also contribute to better structuring mutual expectations and responsibilities in employer-employee relations. In addition, adopting a collective attitude to prevent

employers' circulation and attract workers with slightly higher wage differences will ensure stability in the market and make it possible to plan the labour force more effectively.

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