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SYRIANS IN TURKEY: UNEMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL COHESION

Integration of Syrian refugees⁴ living in Turkey to the labor market carries a risk with regards to social cohesion. According to TurkStat 2014 data, 68.8 percent of those aged over 6 years old in Turkey have a middle school or lower level education.⁵ Furthermore, according to AFAD 2014 report, 79.8 percent of the Syrian refugees of those aged over 6 years old have middle school or lower education.⁶ These numbers indicate that there is the possibility of local and refugee labor force with similar education levels to compete for jobs in the labor market. Therefore, the competition that will arise in the labor market as well as the consequent possibility of social conflicts must be taken into consideration, while discussing the integration of Syrians to Turkish society. This study discusses, the effects of Syrian refugees on regional employment levels, as well as social perceptions that may be influenced by these effects, and their importance with regards to social cohesion.

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⁴ Syrians who arrived in Turkey as a bulk after the Civil War are legally called Foreigners under Temporary Protection. Unless one makes an individual application for asylum in Turkey, they are not considered as refugee. However, regarding their situation in international law we call them as “refugee” in this paper.

⁵ According to TurkStat 2014 data middle school and lower education is the total of graduates from middle school or equivalent professional school, primary school, literates with no degree and illiterates.

⁶ AFAD. 2014. “Population Influx from Syria to Turkey” <https://www.afad.gov.tr/Dokuman/TR/148-20150202172457-11549547929971633783.pdf>

1. Syrians in the Labor Market and Their Effects on Turkey's Work Force

The issuance of work permits to Syrians and the agreement between the EU and Turkey, indicate a change in balance in the labor market. Since 2011, Turkey has witnessed the arrival of more than 2.7 million Syrian refugees and the birth of more than 150 thousand Syrian babies in its borders.⁷ Moreover, 1 million Syrians who are of working- age have been able to participate in the formal economy with the issuance of legal work- permits on January 11, 2016.⁸ Within the scope of these work-permits, refugees under temporary protection were given the right to work in cities they are registered in. Accordingly have been approved to work, as long as the number of refugees under temporary protection employed in a workplace does not exceed 10 percent.⁹ The 10 percent quota restriction is implemented with the intention of protecting the local work force, but also to prevent the victimization of people under temporary protection. Additionally, flexibility is provided on this quota when the employer proves to İŞKUR in four weeks that he or she is unable to find employees with the necessary qualifications for the concerned job opening.¹⁰ As a consequence of the legal issuance of work- permits, the number of refugees included in the formal economy is expected to rise. In addition to this, an agreement has been reached between EU and Turkey on 18th of March, 2016 regarding the readmission of Syrians who have tried to enter the EU illegally, into Turkey.¹¹ With this agreement in place, Syrians who have tried to enter the EU illegally will be sent back to Turkey while the EU, will legally admit a refugee currently living in the camps in Turkey for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey. This agreement is anticipated to slow down and even halt the influx of migration to Europe from Turkey. Therefore, in the short- term, it can be stated that Turkey will not see a decrease in the number Syrians living within its borders. In other words, until the war in Syria ends and the country becomes inhabitable again, it is unlikely for 2.7 million Syrians living in Turkey to leave. Meanwhile, the integration of approximately 1 million people to the labor market is required.

The integration of Syrian refugees to economy could increase competition in the labor market. This proves possible even though there are domestic restrictions for Syrians to obtain work- permits, such as the 10 percent regulation, which restricts total number of Syrian employees in the workplace. In contrast, according to the results obtained from a research, Syrian workforce tends to seek jobs with low level socio-economic aspects.¹² The reasons for this could be explained by (i) the lack of common language, (ii) the low levels of education of the large segment of Syrians, and the inability of Syrians to prove their levels of educations (the diploma problem) and (iii) the tendency of Syrians to easily accept working in bad conditions and for low wages due to their financial needs. When compared to their local population, the cities hosting the most Syrians are, Kilis (97 percent), Hatay (25 percent), Şanlıurfa (20

⁷ http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/2015-turkiye-goc-raporu-yayinlandi_350_359_10058_icerik

<http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/169957/more-than-150000-syrian-babies-born-in-turkey>

⁸ Population aged between 18-59 years old is regarded as the active population

⁹ See 6575 Directive on Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection
<http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/3.5.20168375.pdf>

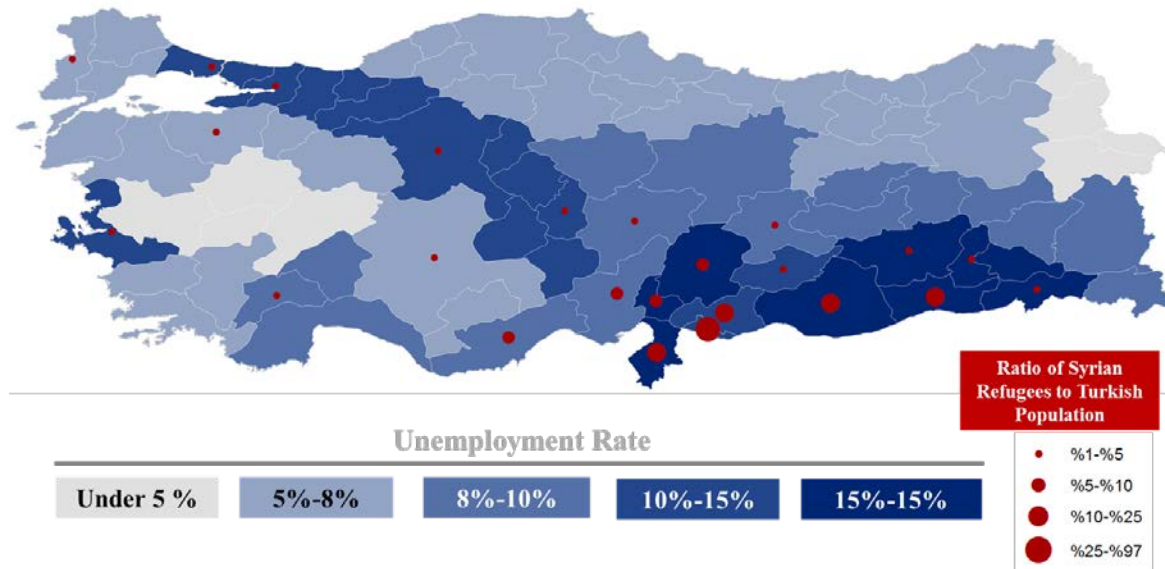
¹⁰ Ministry of Labor and Social Security, UNHCR, IMPR. "Conference on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection". Ankara. 23 March 2016.

¹¹ Kaymaz T. 2016. "Dört soruda AB-Türkiye müzakereleri". TEPAV. <http://www.tepav.org.tr/tr/blog/s/5537>

¹² World Bank 2015. "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Labor Market."

percent), Gaziantep (17 percent) and Mardin (12 percent), respectively.¹³ As observed in Figure 1, most of these cities have higher unemployment rates than that of Turkey’s average. In other words, Syrians residing in cities with high unemployment rates are competing against local workers and job seekers.

Figure 1. Unemployment rate and ratio of Syrian Refugees to Turkish population by provinces, %, 2015



Source: Statistics on number of Syrian refugees are from Directorate General of Migration Management on February 2, 2016. Population and unemployment figures are from TURKSTAT 2015 and visualized by TEPAV. Bubble size represents the ratio of Syrian Refugees to Turkish population. Above 1 percent is represented.

The period before issuing these permits, has seen increased competition in the labor market in cities such as Adiyaman, Gaziantep and Kilis, while a discussion was taking place on whether allowing the Syrian population to work would replace the local population. Prior to 2016, the Syrian refugees were not permitted to be included in domestic employment records unless in special circumstances. This situation was expected to have an impact on unregistered unemployment.¹⁴ In order to follow up on these possible effects, labor statistics of cities in the region which host the highest percentage of Syrians as compared to their local population, such as Gaziantep, Adiyaman and Kilis (TR C1 NUTS2), have been analyzed. Accordingly, it was observed that in 2015 the unemployment rate in this region has increased approximately 25 percent, adding up to a total of 10.1 percent. The unemployment rate is determined by comparing the proportion of unemployed people to the entire workforce (total of employed and unemployed people). In this case, there could be, in simplified terms, two reasons for this rise in unemployment rate: either the number of unemployed has increased or the total workforce has decreased. In this case, the total workforce in the region has actually increased. When the source of this unemployment, which is rising faster in comparison to the country average, is analyzed it is observed that the number of unemployed has risen 30 percent while the total workforce has seen an increase around 5.3 percent. In this regard, the reason for the rapidly increasing unemployment rate in the region is linked to the rise in the number of unemployed, as opposed to a decrease in the total workforce. Moreover, 44 percent of the rise

¹³ Percentage is calculated by [Syrian population in the province ÷ local population in the province]. In Kilis, for instance, there are 97 Syrians per 100 local habitants.

¹⁴ World Bank 2015, *ibid*.

in unemployment stems from the rise in the number of unemployed males in the workforce with education levels below high school (Table 1). In other words, males in the region with low education levels become unemployed faster when compared to the average of Turkey. A study conducted by the Central Bank also supports these findings.¹⁵ In the forenamed study, it has been shown that when the employment rate among Syrian refugees rises, the unemployment rate in Turkey rises as well. The study also proves that the negative effects of this increase in unemployment of locals is prominent mostly on the less advantaged segments of society such as women, youth and the less educated.

Since 2011, there has been a recorded increase in the [number of companies established which have Syrian partners, especially in cities closer to the Syrian border](#). Even though there is an absence of data on the ethnic identities of the employees working in these newly formed companies, it can be inferred that these Syrian companies most probably employ Syrian people, due to cheap labor force and social solidarity. This may spike a rise in the number of employed by the informal economy and inversely, to a decrease in the number of employed by the formal economy.¹⁶ In contrast, the rising number of companies and Syrians working in their own businesses may play a part in the expansion of the workforce.

Table 1. Comparison of labor force statistics in TR C1 NUTS2 Region and Turkey, 2014-2015

	TR C1 Region (Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Kilis)			Turkey		
	2014	2015	Change, %	2014	2015	Change, %
Total labor force, thousand	733	772	5.3%	28098	28929	3.0%
Unemployed, thousand	60	78	30,0%	2839	3039	7.0%
Unemployment rate, %	8.1%	10.1%	24.7%	10.1%	10.5%	4.0%
Unemployed men without completed high school education, thousand	34	42	23.5%	1109	1170	5.5%
Share of unemployed men without completed high school education in increased unemployment, %			44.4%			30.5%

Source: TURKSTAT, TEPAV calculations

2. Social Effects of the Competition Experienced in Work Life

The rising unemployment rates in places where there is a dense Syrian population, have created the perception that Syrians are bereaving jobs from the local population. A survey¹⁷ undertaken in 2014, has showed that the support of the Turkish public to this abovementioned perception to be 56.1 percent. In cities such as Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Mardin, and Urfa the support for this proposition has seen numbers as high as 68.9 percent. In the same survey, 30 percent of the Turkish public has supported the issuance of limited and temporary work permits, while almost half refused the issuance of work permits to Syrian asylum-seekers. Therefore, the perceptions that will be shaped, in light of new regulations,

¹⁵ Ceritoğlu, E. Yüncüler, H. Torun, H. ve Tumen, S. 2015. "The Impact of Syrian Refugees on Natives' Labor Market Outcomes in Turkey: Evidence from a Quasi-Experimental Design." IZA DP No. 9348

¹⁶ [Employment Monitoring Bulletin January 2016](#) of TEPAV finds out that there is a decrease in formal employment in all provinces except Van in the beginning of 2016.

¹⁷ Erdoğan M. M. 2014. "Syrians in Turkey: Social Acceptance and Integration Research". Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Center. <http://www.hugo.hacettepe.edu.tr/HUGO-REPORT-SyriansinTurkey.pdf>

which provide Syrians with work permits and bring about an increased employment of Syrians must be carefully monitored.

Owing to the social competition, it is possible that social perceptions of asylum- seekers could be negatively influenced or asylum- seekers who cannot find jobs could turn to crime. According to a statement given by the Gaziantep's Governor' Office in 2015, only 1.3 percent of criminal cases involved asylum- seeking Syrians.¹⁸ However, social perceptions are being shaped quite independent of this data. According to the data gathered by the previously mentioned surveys; 62 percent of the Turkish public believes that Syrian asylum- seekers are disrupting the public morality and peace in places they are located in by being involved in crimes such as violence, theft, smuggling and prostitution. In cities where there is a dense Syrian population, like Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Mardin and Urfa, this belief reaches up to 70 percent. Furthermore, indeed, social tensions are formed around perceptions rather than the realities.

Competition and negative social perceptions in the labor force could bring about social conflicts. For example, according to a survey¹⁹ conducted in USA in 2006, 33 percent of African- Americans believe that Latin Americans steal the American jobs, while 59 percent of Latin Americans believe that African-Americans are lazy and untrustworthy. The negative perceptions in relation to labor force, of these two segments who are fighting over low paying jobs has given rise to hate crimes amongst them. In Los Angeles in 2006, while the proportion of African-American suspects in the hate crimes committed against people of Latin American descent was 80 percent, the proportion of Latin Americans suspected of committing hate crimes against people of African-American decent was 70 percent.²⁰ With regards to this, being financially strong and having a healthy labor market provides the chance to strengthen the harmony between different segments and helps reduce social conflicts. In 2001 a study conducted in the multicultural cities of India, economic freedom and access to work has been shown to reduce propensity of violence among different ethnic groups.²¹ Examples such as these emphasize, the vitality of labor market in ending social conflicts and achieving cohesion. Although the current competition has yet to reach alarming levels in Turkey; precautionary actions must be taken in order to avoid similar scenarios in regions where there is a large Syrian population.

¹⁸ <http://www.gaziantepafad.gov.tr/SURIYELI-MISAFIRLERIMIZE-YONELIK-CALISTAY-DUZENLENDI.150>

¹⁹ Pew Research Center. 2007. "Americans and Social Trust: Who, Where and Why."
<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2007/02/22/americans-and-social-trust-who-where-and-why/>

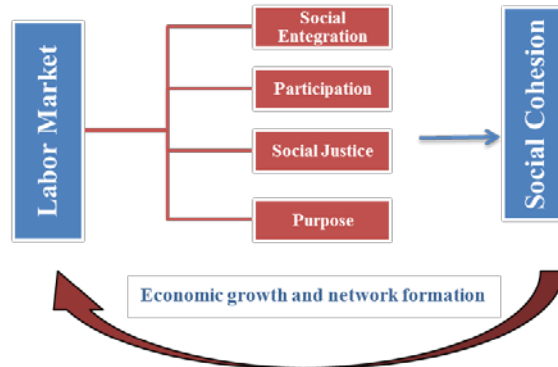
²⁰ <http://www.economist.com/node/9587776>

²¹ Varshney, A. 2002. "Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India." New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

3. Policy Tools for Compatible Employment

Having a strong, harmonious and a just labor market is one of the most important channels to achieve social cohesion. According to reports published by the World Bank²² and OECD²³, the job market, contributes to social cohesion by strengthening social relationships between different ethnic and social groups. A strong and a just labor market increases social participation and integration, facilitates the reach of people to justice and most importantly could provide people with a reason to live (See Figure 2). Moreover, social cohesion strengthened with a strong labor market will also enhance economic growth.²⁴ On the other hand, unjust distribution and high unemployment rates could lead to conflicts between different social groups. For this reason, policy makers must take into consideration the balance of social cohesion when contemplating how to include Syrians to the Turkish workforce.

Figure 2. Balance of labor market in growth model and the social cohesion



Source: Wietzke, F. B. (2014), TEPAV visualization

It is necessary to extend the implementation of applications that increase job capacity and opportunities to regions with high Syrian populations. Initiatives to increase employment should be undertaken. These include, i) broadening incentives which aid operational SME's to scale- up; ii) supporting entrepreneurs and providing mentorships aiming to ensure an easier transition to enable them to work; iii) the creation of efforts to improve their knowledge and skills in cooperation with academics in nearby universities; iv) identifying lacking areas in the job market and the vocational training of personnels aimed at these areas. The fact is that, when the people who are involved in the economy feel self- confident and have high hopes for the future, their integration into society accelerates and also positively invokes the social cohesion of these people to different strata of the society.

In conclusion, the economic conflicts arising from competition must be taken into consideration in order for the social and economic integration of Syrian to be successful. The best way to avoid social conflicts, induced by rising competition that arises from cheap labor market, is the creation of new job opportunities. For this reason, support for new projects targeting the creation of new job opportunities is necessary for these asylum- seekers to be justly and safely included in the job market. The job market, aside from its economic connotations, is a mechanism of integrating individuals to society, strengthening justice and democracy, and providing people with a reason to live. Moreover, it has been recorded that individuals with a job have higher social participation and self- confidence.²⁵ In this regard,

²² Wietzke, F. B. 2014. "Pathways from Jobs to Social Cohesion", World Bank.

²³ Jones, R. S. and Urasawa S. 2013. "Labor Market Policies to Promote Growth and Social Cohesion in Korea", OECD Economics Department Working Papers, No. 1068, OECD Publishing.

²⁴ Çilingir, Y.S. 2016. "Social Cohesion for Growth" TEPAV. http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/1458830335-3.Social_Cohesion_for_Economic_Growth.pdf

²⁵ World Bank. 2013. "World Development Report: Jobs" Chapter 4. Pp:126-151 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTNWDR2013/Resources/8258024-1320950747192/8260293-1322665883147/Chapter-4.pdf>

social cohesion can be reinforced through applicable projects which can emphasize on the benefit that Syrian labor force can create in collaboration with local labor force. For example, new projects may be developed seeking to create new areas of work which in turn allow for the employment of, both, Syrians and Turkish people. The creation of additional resources by production for exports and production' contribution to the Turkish economy, can help with the economic and social integration of those who are employed, as well as make them feel safer in this integration process. The integration of Syrians, who are showing signs of post- traumatic stress disorder, to the labor market constitutes special importance based on these aforementioned reasons. If not, the risk of these individuals' affecting the society through criminal channels is probable due to their psychological states.