

# Untold Struggles: Unveiling Employment Challenges Faced by Asylum Seekers in Türkiye

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**Abstract:** In the 21st century, conflicts all over the world still cause people to leave their homes and/or countries and seek refuge in other countries. Due to Türkiye's geographical location and history as a former empire, it has faced numerous requests for asylum since its founding. This research was conducted using the principles of the phenomenological approach and by interviewing 15 asylum seekers (6 of Afghanistan and 9 of Iraqi nationality) and 17 non-governmental organization (NGO) professionals working with asylum seekers in Ankara in order to delve into the challenges asylum seekers face in accessing employment and the problems in employment. Data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study are categorized into three themes: (1) Challenges faced by asylum seekers in the labour market; (2) Problems in assessing employment from a professional perspective; and (3) Common misconceptions and

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priority issues in the employment of asylum seekers. A total of 16 sub-themes were included under these themes. It has been determined that asylum seekers in Türkiye are forced to work in unregistered and temporary jobs, under severe conditions such as long working hours, with a salary lower than the minimum wage. It is also concluded that asylum seekers are inadequate in terms of language skills and lack of professional skills that facilitate access to the labour market; some asylum seekers cannot receive their wages from employers and they do not know any legal mechanisms that they can apply and claim their rights in such cases.

**Keywords:** Employment, asylum seekers, international protection, challenges, Türkiye.

### **Anlatılmamış Mücadeleler: Türkiye'deki Sığınmacıların Karşılaştığı İstihdam Zorluklarının Ortaya Çıkarılması**

**Öz:** 21. yüzyılda dünyanın dört bir yanında yaşanan çatışmalar hâlâ insanların evlerini ve/veya ülkelerini terk etmelerine ve başka ülkelere sığınmalarına neden olmaktadır. Eski bir imparatorluk mirasını devralan Türkiye'nin coğrafi konumu ve tarihi, kuruluşundan bu yana çok sayıda sığınma talebiyle karşı karşıya kalmasına neden olmuştur. Bu araştırma, fenomenolojik yaklaşımın ilkeleri esas alınarak yürütülmüş ve Türkiye'deki sığınmacıların istihdama erişimde karşılaştıkları zorlukları ve istihdamda yaşadıkları sorunları keşfetmek için araştırma kapsamında Ankara'da ikamet eden 15 sığınmacı (6'sı Afganistan, 9'u Irak uyruklu) ve sığınmacılarla çalışan 17 sivil toplum kuruluşu (STK) çalışanıyla görüşülmüştür. Veriler tematik analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları üç tema altında sunulmuştur: (1) Sığınmacıların istihdam piyasasında karşılaştıkları zorluklar; (2) Profesyonellerin bakış açısıyla istihdam alanındaki sorunlar; (3) Sığınmacıların istihdamı konusunda doğru bilinen yanlışlar ve öncelikli konular. Bu temalar altında toplam 16 alt temaya yer verilmiştir. Türkiye'de bulunan sığınmacıların kayıt dışı ve geçici işlerde, uzun çalışma süreleri gibi ağır koşullar altında, asgari ücretten daha düşük bir ücretle çalışmak zorunda kaldıkları tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca sığınmacıların işgücü piyasasına erişimi kolaylaştıran dil bilgisi ve mesleki beceri eksikliği gibi konularda yetersiz oldukları; bazı sığınmacıların işverenlerden ücretlerini alamadıkları ve böyle durumlarda başvurabilecekleri ve haklarını arayabilecekleri hukuki mekanizmaları da bilmedikleri sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İstihdam, sığınmacılar, uluslararası koruma, zorluklar, Türkiye.

## Introduction

Today, conflicts in different parts of the world trigger new migration movements and millions of people are forced to leave their homes and/or countries and seek refuge in other countries. In August 2021, as seen in the example of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers who had to leave the country after the conflicts in Afghanistan, these migration movements reach mass dimensions and force people to leave their lands to other geographies without making any exception for women, children, older adults and persons with disabilities. During and after this mobility, some basic needs arise, such as food, shelter and access to health services. Although governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations in destination countries contribute to meeting these needs, asylum seekers often have to meet their own needs. At this point, it is crucial for asylum seekers to have a job, to be able to work and to fulfil their needs in the destination countries.

Employment can be briefly defined as a person working for someone else(s) in order to meet his/her vital needs and receiving wages in return for this labour after a certain period of time. However, in recent years, the issue of employment, especially in undeveloped and developing countries, has been brought to the agenda by the situation of inability to work or unemployment rather than the situation of working. The fact that public and social life came to a standstill almost all over the world with the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the emergence of significant employment problems regardless of the country (Fana et al., 2020; Erol, 2020). At a time when citizens are facing unemployment problems, asylum seekers' access to formal/unregistered employment in destination countries is becoming more difficult and the tension between "citizens" and "non-citizens" is increasing.

This study, focusing on the challenges faced by asylum seekers in accessing employment and the problems in employment, first addresses the current situation of asylum seekers in Türkiye. Then, the needs of asylum seekers and their access to employment in Türkiye is analysed based on both the information and findings in the literature, and the participant views. At the end of the study, a general evaluation of this issue is given and various recommendations are presented.

## Current Situation of Asylum Seekers in Türkiye

Due to its geographical location and as the heir to a former empire, Türkiye has been confronted with various applications for asylum since its foundation. The period, which started with the protocol signed between Türkiye and Greece in 1923, continued over time with the migration of Turkish descendants from the former imperial territories who were pushed into Türkiye (Bozdağhoğlu, 2014; Sürmeli, 2016). In addition to these kinship-based migration movements, there have been increasing individual and mass migration movements to Türkiye from Iran after the 1979 revolution, from Iraq after the Gulf Wars and the Halabja

massacre, from Syria after the Arab Spring and finally from Afghanistan after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. First and foremost, asylum seekers are demanding that their need for security be met and that they be granted the right to apply for asylum.

Türkiye offers four different international protection statuses to asylum seekers. These are refugee, conditional refugee, subsidiary protection and temporary protection status. However, due to Türkiye's "geographical reservation" to the 1951 Refugee Convention, asylum seekers from outside Europe are not granted asylum seeker status. According to the *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (LFIP), they are defined as "conditional refugees" (Article 62/1) and are allowed to stay in Türkiye until they are resettled in a third country. Currently, temporary protection status is only granted to Syrians who have taken refuge in Türkiye en masse. Subsidiary protection refers to a right to protection granted to foreigners or stateless individuals who do not qualify as refugees or conditional refugees, but who would be under threat of life-threatening or inhuman treatment if returned to their country. This status (subsidiary protection) is rarely granted in Türkiye. As a result, persons with international protection status may have various rights depending on their status. These rights are determined by various regulations, particularly the LFIP (Çingir and Erdağ, 2017).

As is well known, the right to asylum and the subsequent status of the asylum seeker is a stage that comprises the assessment process prior to the individual's refugee status. And, this study focuses on asylum seekers from outside Europe (Afghanistan and Iraq) seeking international protection in Türkiye. These people cannot be legally granted refugee status, yet can be granted conditional refugee status at best.

Among the foreign population in Türkiye, there are two categories whose exact numbers are unknown: asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Statistics on Syrians under temporary protection and foreigners in Türkiye with residence permits are clearly recorded and shared with the public and relevant stakeholders<sup>4</sup>. However, unfortunately, there is no clear number of persons with international protection statuses other than temporary protection (conditional refugee and subsidiary protection) in Türkiye. In this regard, as can be seen in the table below, it is only possible to access the number of people who applied for international protection status according to years.

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<sup>4</sup> Please visit the official website of the Presidency of Migration Management to access the data: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

**Table 1. International Protection Applications by Years**

Year	International protection applications	Year	International protection applications
2010	8.932	2017	112.415
2011	17.925	2018	114.537
2012	29.678	2019	56.417
2013	30.311	2020	31.334
2014	34.112	2021	29.256
2015	64.232	2022	33.246
2016	66.167	2023	19.017

**Reference:** Presidency of Migration Management, 2024

A total of 647,579 people applied for international protection in Türkiye between 2010 and 2023. The highest number of applications were made in 2017 (112,415 people) and 2018 (114,537 people), and the top three countries of application were (1) Afghanistan, (2) Iraq and (3) Iran. However, it is not known how many of the people who applied for international protection during this period were accepted. After the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a dramatic decline in international asylum applications. In 2023, the number of international protection applicants in Türkiye declined to 19,017. This number corresponds to approximately 1 in 6 of the number of applications 5 years ago. In addition, the applications made in 2023 decreased by 43% compared to 2022 (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024).

## **Access to Employment and Challenges faced by Asylum Seekers in the Labour Market**

In Türkiye, asylum seekers' access to employment and the challenges they face in the labour market is often a multifaceted and complex issue. It is important to discuss access to employment first. Indeed, the challenges faced by asylum seekers in the labour market start with the obstacles and problems experienced in access to employment. Among the reasons that negatively affect the access of asylum seekers to employment in Türkiye, legal regulations can be mentioned first; since there is a quota for the employers in the employment of asylum seekers and there is an obligation to obtain a work permit. Moreover, work permit applications of asylum seekers can only be made by employers. Work permits have to be renewed every year and a fee has to be paid by employers (Alamyar and Boz, 2022). On the other hand, the presence of millions of Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye and hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants from different countries increases the labour surplus. Therefore, all these reasons lead to difficulties for asylum seekers in accessing the labour market.

When an asylum seeker enters the labour market, a more challenging process and various difficulties await him/her. In addition to legal difficulties, language barrier, occupational inadequacies, discrimination, social cohesion and intercultural differences, exclusion, access to social security and health services come to the fore (Topgöl, 2016; Göç Araştırmaları Derneği, 2022; İkizoğlu and Dağ, 2023).

It is known that asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iraq, who are the sample of this study, work mainly in agriculture and livestock, textile, construction and various types of the service sector (Karakaya and Karakaya, 2021; Göç Araştırmaları Derneği, 2022; Alamyar and Boz, 2022; Kara and Kaya Tilbe, 2023). In a study conducted by İkizoğlu and Dağ (2023), it was determined that the Afghans faced problems such as unemployment, working at low wages, not being able to pay rent, not receiving their salaries on time, not getting enough food, exclusion, physical violence, discrimination, not getting enough education, social and cultural adaptation, lack of motivation and discrimination. Similarly, in a study conducted with Iraqis in Tokat, it was determined that these people experience problems such as being underpaid or paid less than the agreed wage, long working hours, heavy work, exclusion and maltreatment in the workplace. (Topgöl, 2016).

In the literature, it is underlined that the sectors where asylum seekers work intensively already have a precarious structure. The presence of asylum seekers and irregular migrants in these sectors brings new forms of precarity and economic vulnerability. This situation negatively affects the working conditions and bargaining power of all workers in these sectors, which already have deep and diverse forms of exploitation. Therefore, this increased supply of labour has resulted in a decrease in daily wages and a decrease in the total income per household. Hence, the labour market in Türkiye is evolving into a process of precarisation for both asylum seekers and other workers (Alamyar and Boz, 2022; Örmeci Güney and Cengiz, 2023).

In Türkiye, most of the studies on access to employment for persons with international protection are related to Syrians under temporary protection (Orhan and Gündoğar, 2015; Lordoğlu and Aslan, 2016; Öztoraman-Adıgüzel and Tanyaş, 2020; Erdoğan, 2020). A similar trend is also valid for the media and news. In a study conducted on migrants in the labour market in Türkiye, it was found that news about African, Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers who came to Türkiye for different reasons are given very limited news about their work life, labour rights, employment or unemployment (Rittersberger-Tılıç and Bal, 2019). Therefore, studies on asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iraq, who are the sample of this study, are of utmost importance in terms of their visibility and recognition. In fact, it is known that these individuals have less legal protection and access to rights compared to Syrians. This leads to a more vulnerable conditions for them.

Employment is an important factor for the integration or social cohesion of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. These groups could gain the economic

power to meet their own needs and reduce the risk of tensions with the local community through employment. Furthermore, through employment, asylum seekers can improve their language skills, build new social networks and develop a sense of belonging to society. Therefore, it is very important for destination countries to regulate the labour market for asylum seekers and create inclusive laws (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014; Aygül, 2018).

Work permits for foreigners in Türkiye are issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MoLSS). According to the legislation, it is not possible for dependent foreigners to submit an individual application. The application of a foreigner can only be made by the company that wishes to employ him/her. This system can prevent foreigners from working in the fields and workplaces of their choice, makes them dependent on employers or workplaces and leads to lengthy application procedures and processes. Although the number of people who have been granted work permits has increased steadily in recent years (MoLSS, 2024), this number is small compared to the number of foreign nationals in Türkiye. This observation points to the problem of informality in the employment of foreign workers in Türkiye.

**Table 2. Number of work permits issued to foreigners by years (between 2015-2022)**

Year	Number	Year	Number
2015	64,402	2019	145,232
2016	73,410	2020	123,574
2017	87,150	2021	168,103
2018	115,826	2022	212,682

**Reference:** MoLSS, 2024

The aim of this study is to investigate the access to employment of asylum seekers in Türkiye and the difficulties and problems they face in this regard, as well as to evaluate the misconceptions and priorities on this issue. Building upon the existing context and framework outlined, this research aims to address the following questions:

- Do asylum seekers in Ankara have difficulties in finding employment?
- What are the factors that influence the employment of asylum seekers in Ankara? In other words, what are the criteria for taking up employment?
- What are the experiences<sup>5</sup> of asylum seekers in Ankara in terms of employment?

<sup>5</sup> These consist of the experiences of asylum seekers who are directly in employment or the testimonies of asylum seekers who have been in employment for some time or have relatives/friends in employment (witness-based experiences).

## **Methods**

This qualitative research was conducted on the basis of the principles of the phenomenological approach. The main aim of the phenomenological approach is to understand or discover people's experiences (Van Manen, 2007). There are different definitions about phenomenological approach. However, in general, it can be defined as a qualitative research method that enables people to express their understanding, feelings, perspectives and perceptions about a particular phenomenon or concept and is used to explain how they experience any phenomenon (Tekindal and Uğuz Arsu, 2020).

## **Participants**

This research was conducted with persons with international protection and professionals working in various NGOs in Ankara. In accordance with the aim of the research, it was decided to use the purposive sampling method in this study. It is known that purposive sampling method is mainly used in qualitative research which aims to explore the experiences of the participants (Neuman, 2012). In order to learn participants' experiences in as much detail as possible, the greatest possible diversity was sought. Efforts were made to reach asylum seekers of different genders, ages and ethnicities. In addition, attempts were undertaken to reach professional staff from non-governmental organizations working with asylum seekers in different regions of Ankara.



**Table 3. Some Demographic Information of the Participants**

Some demographic information on asylum seekers					
No	Nickname	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Country of Origin
1.	Red	Female	27	Single	Afghanistan
2.	Pink	Female	30	Divorced	Afghanistan
3.	White	Male	33	Married	Afghanistan
4.	Black	Male	18	Single	Afghanistan
5.	Brown	Female	55	Married	Iraq
6.	Grey	Female	21	Single	Iraq
7.	Navy Blue	Male	54	Married	Iraq
8.	Burgundy	Male	44	Married	Iraq
9.	Turquoise	Male	56	Married	Iraq
10.	Violett	Female	39	X	Iraq
11.	Yellow	Female	41	Widow	Iraq
12.	Purple	Male	18	Single	Afghanistan
13.	Green	Female	37	Married	Afghanistan
14.	Blue	Female	34	Married	Iraq
15.	Orange	Male	28	Single	Iraq
Some demographic information on professionals					
No	Nickname (Professionals)	Gender	Marital Status	Education Level	Nickname (NGOs)
1.	Kübra	Female	Single	Undergraduate	Unlimited Volunteers
2.	İlknur	Female	Single	Undergraduate	Unlimited Volunteers
3.	Derya	Female	Single	Master	Unlimited Volunteers
4.	Nazlı	Female	Married	Master	Unlimited Volunteers
5.	Elif	Female	Single	Undergraduate	Unlimited Volunteers
6.	Azize	Female	Married	Undergraduate	Unlimited Volunteers
7.	Deniz	Female	Single	Master	Unlimited Volunteers
8.	Ashhan	Female	Married	Master	Colour of the Earth
9.	Emre	Male	Single	Undergraduate	Spirit of Solidarity
10.	Gizem	Female	Single	Undergraduate	Colour of the Sky
11.	Oya	Female	Single	Master	Colour of the Earth
12.	Abdurrahman	Male	Single	Master	Unlimited Volunteers
13.	Büşra	Female	Married	Undergraduate	Colour of the Sky
14.	Gökçe	Female	Single	Master	Unlimited Volunteers
15.	Metin	Male	Single	Master	Spirit of Solidarity
16.	Emine	Female	Married	Undergraduate	Beautiful Future
17.	Eren	Male	Married	Master	Colour of the Sky

A total of 32 participants, 15 asylum seekers (6 of Afghanistan and 9 of Iraqi nationality) and 17 professionals, were interviewed between April and September 2019 as part of the study. The inclusion criteria for asylum seeker participants were

that they had been in Türkiye for at least three years and had international protection status; and for professional participants that they had been actively working in the field of migration for at least three years, and the interviews were conducted with those who met these criteria.

In this research, both employed and unemployed asylum seekers were interviewed. Thus, it is aimed to address employment difficulties from a broader perspective. Some participants did not work themselves. However, their children or relatives were employed. Their views provided a broader perspective on the issue.

## **Generating and Analyzing Data**

The data for this study was obtained through in-depth interviews conducted using a semi-structured interview guide created by the researchers. The semi-structured interview guide was created taking into account opinions from the literature and academics working in the field. After conducting the pilot interviews with four participants (2 asylum seekers and 2 professionals), the required adjustments were made. In addition to the warm-up and self-introduction questions, participants were asked questions designed to reveal the difficulties they had experienced in the field of employment in depth.

The in-depth interviews with the asylum seekers were conducted in the presence of an interpreter. Before the interviews, the interpreter was informed about the purpose of the study and trained not to disturb the atmosphere of the interview or step out of his role as interpreter. Interviews with professionals were conducted without an interpreter.

The interviews with the asylum seekers were conducted in the rooms provided by the NGOs, while the interviews with the professionals took place in their rooms. The interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. At least two researchers participated in each interview. One of the researchers took responsibility as an assistant to the interviewer. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed by the researchers.

The technique of inductive thematic analysis developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was used in this study. In the analysis, the audio files were first transcribed into text, then codes were created on the text, and in the next stage, similar codes were merged to identify themes. MAXQDA, one of the computer programs, was used to facilitate the analysis process.

A number of validity and reliability measures were used in the analysis and reporting of this study. To contribute to validity, the data obtained were compared with the results of other studies and the literature, and the technique of 'triangulation' was applied. In addition, intensive and rich descriptions were included, taking into account the upper vocabulary set by the journal for the articles. Since the data obtained in the in-depth interviews were consensus-based and coded jointly by the

researchers and they collaborated throughout the process, an intercoder consensus test was not required to increase reliability (Creswell, 2018).

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented under three themes: (1) Challenges faced by asylum seekers in the labour market; (2) Problems in assessing employment from a professional perspective; and (3) Common misconceptions and priority issues in the employment of asylum seekers. A total of 16 sub-themes were included under these themes.

### Challenges Faced by Asylum Seekers in the Labour Market

Access to the labour market for asylum seekers is a difficult process. Asylum seekers are often forced to work in unskilled, risky, and precarious jobs that disregard human dignity. This situation brings into play the concept of “precariat”, which has been frequently mentioned in recent years in connection with the new global expansions of neoliberalism and the transformation of post-Fordist relations of production. The concept of precariat, which Standing (2020) defines as the “child of globalization”, can be briefly described as a new class that does not have even a minimum level of security in the labour market, has to work in the most flexible market possible, regularly works in temporary/irregular jobs, and has only vague social protection (Standing, 2017; Aygül, 2018; Standing, 2020). It can be noted that this new or anti-social class, now defined as precariat (Aygül, 2018), includes not only temporary and seasonal workers, known for their flexible employment and working conditions, and workers working in the service sector, but also women, children, migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees (Bora et al., 2011; Vatanserver, 2013).

This change in the labour market leads to the emergence of intersectionality in the difficulties faced or potentially faced by asylum seekers who are considered part of the precariat. Asylum seekers face various difficulties not only in accessing the labour market, but also in workplace. The main challenges they face include lack of knowledge and language skills to access the mechanisms that protect them and help them claim their rights (Göç Araştırmaları Derneği, 2022), not having formal employment, being poorer than the local population (Tümtaş, 2022), having to work for lower wages and in harsh conditions (Topgül, 2016; İkizoğlu and Dağ, 2023), and not being able to participate in mechanisms such as trade unions to defend their rights against employers. However, the biggest challenge in this research is the inability to speak or fully understand the language spoken by the local community.

#### *Language barriers*

Asylum seekers' access to employment increases their economic opportunities and significantly reduces the challenges they face (Aygüler et al., 2021). When analyzing

the position of persons with international protection status in Türkiye in the labour market, it has been found that they face serious disadvantages due to their inability to communicate with employers and other employees in the workplace (Association for Solidarity with Refugees, 2015; Şimşek, 2019; Öztoraman-Adıgüzel and Tanyaş, 2020). The following is the narrative of an asylum seeker whose child cannot take up a job because he does not speak the language.

Actually they don't speak the language, they don't speak Turkish, that's the biggest problem. My son Yahya<sup>6</sup> is actually a tall young handsome boy. He had worked in a supermarket in Iraq, he knows and understands that kind of work. He applied to the market for a job here too. They didn't take him, they said you don't speak the language well. If he knew the language, maybe they would have hired him (Yellow, Iraqi, Female, 41 years old).

#### *Low Wages*

Interviews with participants revealed that asylum seekers are often forced to work under difficult conditions for low wages. In fact, the literature states that asylum seekers mostly work in agriculture, construction, and textiles, especially in jobs that the host society does not want, where working conditions are harsh and wages are low (Del Carpio and Wagner, 2015; Korkmaz, 2018; Oğuz et al., 2020). The following are the statements of an asylum seeker who works as an unskilled laborer during the day and as a security guard at night for 1500<sup>7</sup> Turkish liras per month at a construction site:

In the mornings, I clean, for example, their guests come and I give them tea in the kitchen. I keep an eye on people around the site. In the evenings, I try to keep thieves away. In the evenings, no one stays in the construction site, only me. It's empty. The boss told me to set your alarm at one o'clock, three o'clock, five o'clock at night and go around, just in case, so I am afraid, but I have to do it. I am not that comfortable, but I have to, there is nothing else to do (Purple, Afghan, Male, 18 years old).

#### *Failure to Receive Wages*

The fact that migrants and asylum seekers do not receive their wages from the places where they work is a common problem in the field of employment (Human

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<sup>6</sup> As stated in the section on the participants, not all of the interviewed asylum seekers are included in the labour market. In order to explore the researched phenomenon from different perspectives, interviews were also conducted with asylum seekers who have a family member or relative working.

<sup>7</sup> Considering that the minimum wage in 2019 is 2.020,59 Turkish Liras, it is understood that they have to work for a wage below the minimum.

Resources Development Foundation, 2015; Coşkun and Yılmaz, 2018; Güzel, 2020). Although asylum seekers' precarious work in unregistered jobs and their discrimination by employers are possible reasons for this situation, it is mainly asylum seekers' lack of work permits and their lack of sufficient knowledge to claim their rights that increase employers' motivation in this regard.

We have Afghan friends in Dışkapı and they have a lot of difficulties. They work everywhere but they aren't paid. For example, my daughter's friends worked in some places but they didn't get paid. They fired them without giving their salaries. They cannot defend their rights. I mean, who can tell them that I worked here and they didn't pay me? (Green, Afghan, Female, 37 years old).

#### *Harsh Conditions*

It is quite striking that an asylum seeker whose spouse works in difficult conditions compared her spouse's working conditions and income status in her country of origin to her current working conditions. This participant stated that at his current workplace where he works as a porter, her husband cannot even take time off during the day to pray, that when he does not work on special occasions such as holidays or when he is sick, he does not receive a salary unlike members of the local community, and that her husband is very unhappy at work with the following statements.

We used to do well in Iraq. He was good there, for example, he would leave at 8:00 and come back at 15:00. The money was also very good, we had a very good car there, our house was ours. Since my husband does not speak Turkish, he carries goods here. He is like a porter. My job is hard, he says he never sits down. He is constantly working. He cannot rest in any way. The boss tells him to work all the time. He doesn't even allow prayer. Every day, every day I die. Every day is a death for me. He says he wants to go back to Iraq, but how can we go back? (Blue, Iraqi, Female, 34 years old).

#### *Unregistered Work*

According to the *International Labour Law No. 6735* (2016), asylum seekers must have a work permit to begin employment. Employers are reluctant to apply for a work permit because only employers can apply for a work permit and there are fees for the application. Employers also do not want to bear the increased cost of paying an employee's social security contributions. At this point, asylum seekers who are already struggling to find employment are forced to work in unregistered jobs in order to survive (Doğan, 2019; İşcan and Çakır, 2019; İkiizoğlu and Dağ, 2023).

Both my boys work. One works for a company that makes ice for pharmaceuticals. The other one does transportation for the company. He

has a small truck. He transports plastic windows and doors. He has no insurance, he gets his salary weekly. He asked his boss if he could get a work permit and asked him to insure him, but his boss told him that he didn't insure Turks, why should he insure him. The boss got angry and refused (Violet, Iraqi, Female, 39 years old).

#### *Exposure to Work Accidents*

In order not to increase costs in jobs or workplaces where asylum seekers or migrants work, the necessary measures for health and safety in the workplace are often not taken (Civan and Gökalp, 2011; Bilek et al., 2019). As can be understood from the statements of the participants, asylum seekers who have to work long hours in difficult jobs are more vulnerable to work accidents. The following statements support the points underlined in previous studies.

They find work, but it is always extremely tiring, heavy work. They never stop standing for 10 hours. One of my brothers was working at a job and fell at work. The boss did not provide any support. He did not take any responsibilities. Anyway, the work they were doing was heavy (Orange, Iraqi, Male, 28 years old).

Although the *Law on Occupational Health and Safety* (2012) requires employers to provide occupational health and safety training in their workplaces (Kılış and Demir, 2012), occupational health and safety training are often not provided to asylum seekers because employers consider it unnecessary and asylum seekers do not speak Turkish. However, studies have shown that workers with low education levels and low language skills are more likely to be exposed to workplace accidents than workers with high education levels (Bilek et al., 2019). In addition, employers do not fulfill their legal obligations to asylum seekers who suffer work accidents (Coşkun and Yılmaz, 2018; Rittersberger-Tılıç and Bal, 2019).

The professionals interviewed on this topic also state that asylum seekers are often forced to perform heavy and risky work without having the necessary training due to discriminatory attitudes towards them, which often leads to accidents at work. Below you will find the statements of a professional on this subject.

In other words, so many people, almost all of them, work without security. Work accidents are very common. This is also due to the inexperience of these people in that profession. Because they don't receive any training or orientation. They have to do it just to earn money. (Nazlı, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

#### *Inadequacy of Legal Mechanisms*

Although employers employ asylum seekers much cheaper than native community members and with long hours, as evidenced by the participants' statements above,

some employers fire their employees without paying them wages or exploit them economically by paying them too little. The most critical point in such cases is that there is no legal mechanism for asylum seekers who are economically exploited by their employers (Koç et al., 2015; Coşkun and Yılmaz, 2018).

For example, a refugee works for three months and then his/her boss fires him/her and does not pay him/her. It is very important for us to have a work permit in order to claim a right. Asylum seekers come to our center, but since they do not have a work permit, we are faced with the question of whether filing a lawsuit can harm them (Abdurrahman, Male, Unlimited Volunteers).

#### *Failure to Organize*

Asylum seekers in Türkiye also do not have access to social benefits and social assistance to which members of the local community are entitled by virtue of their citizenship rights. Therefore, they are forced to accept the jobs offered to them even though they are paid less than Turkish nationals doing the same work, are employed precariously, and face discrimination in the workplace (İşcan and Çakır, 2019; İkizoğlu and Dağ, 2023). The fact that asylum seekers do not have formal employment and that there are many alternative asylum seekers for employers has a negative impact on the organization. As a result, asylum seekers are not able to achieve success in improving working conditions.

Asylum seekers also have to work, so there are not many jobs available. Employers think about how much labour they can employ cheaply. Asylum seekers cannot stand strong at this point, they cannot do something on their own. They cannot say that we are aware of our rights, you cannot make us work like this, you cannot make us work this many hours for this wage (İlknur, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

This situation is reminiscent of Marx's (2015) concept of the reserve labour force/industrial army. Marx (2015) discusses this concept in the chapter on the general law of capitalist accumulation. According to Marx (2015), in order for capital accumulation to continue and expand, the capitalist system wants to constantly produce a new, more than necessary labour force. It is the unemployed or the part-time/temporary workers who will provide this. Marx (2015) defines this surplus population as the reserve labour force/industrial army. While some of this population is forced into unemployment, others are forced into part-time/temporary work; some are forced to work long hours in low-paying and precarious jobs and live with the fear that they may be permanently unemployed. Thus, it can be said that capital uses this reserve labour force/industrial army as a means to keep the working labour force under pressure and ensure the continuity of capital accumulation by making this population work for low wages with the fear that they could lose their jobs at any time.

## **Problems in Employment from a Professional Perspective**

In interviews with professionals about the employment of persons with international protection status, it was concluded that they are more disadvantaged than persons under temporary protection status (i.e. Syrians). It was learned that asylum seekers are forced to work in poor and precarious conditions, they cannot work in the jobs they were trained for in their countries of origin and they are victimized by their employers by not being paid their wages.

### *Those under Temporary Protection are More Advantageous*

It was stated that it is more difficult for asylum seekers to access employment than Syrians under temporary protection, and that they have an advantage over other international protection status holders due to their higher number and greater protection under national legislation (e.g. Temporary Protection Regulation) compared to other asylum-seekers.

While Syrians are told that they can apply for work permits immediately without any discrimination, non-Syrian asylum seekers are told that they can apply for work permits after six months. For non-Syrians, the process is very difficult. Getting a work permit is a very bureaucratic process. It requires many documents. It is already difficult for an asylum seeker to find a job, and when these procedures are added on top of that, everything becomes more and more difficult (Gökçe, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

As stated in the quote above, asylum seekers who do not have temporary protection status must wait at least six months to obtain a work permit, which creates many difficulties and harassment. Moreover, it would be unrealistic to expect that people who have abandoned their citizenship, their country, their possessions and their jobs, or have given them up for very low wages and have come to Türkiye just to survive, can live for six months on the little money they bring with them.

### *Asylum Seekers Themselves cannot Obtain Work Permits*

The biggest challenge for asylum seekers in the area of employment is the inability to apply for a work permit themselves. Because asylum seekers cannot apply for and obtain work permits and employers do not want to incur the additional costs of formal employment, they are forced to work for low wages and cannot claim their rights. Opinions of the interviewed professionals on asylum seekers' obtaining work permits are as follows.

The biggest problem for these people is the work permit. Although it is not very difficult, it is unfortunately a handicap because the employer is expected to apply for a work permit and many employers do not know about this application and do not want to learn about it. In fact, it is against law to employ foreigners without a work permit and there is a



penalty, but there is no supervision of employers by the public. (Nazlı, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

At this point, the unwillingness of employers to pay the fees required for the work permit is obvious due to the fact that the work permit is initially issued for one year and the application for renewal of the work permit must be submitted 60 days before the expiration of the permit if it is to be renewed. In addition, the fact that asylum seekers may constitute a maximum of 10% of workers who are citizens of the Republic of Türkiye can be described as an obstacle to asylum seekers' access to employment (Aygüler et al., 2021).

#### *Asylum Seekers can Work in Certain Sectors*

According to professionals, asylum seekers generally find work in construction and industry sector, where economic returns are lower than in the service sector and conditions are relatively more difficult.

There is a place in Ankara known as “Siteleler”. Here, asylum seekers work very intensively in furniture production. They also work in the construction sector. Apart from that, there is almost no other field for asylum seekers because at least you need to know the language to do office work. Since adult asylum seekers do not have sufficient knowledge of Turkish, they can work in jobs that require physical strength. This situation causes them to be excluded from the labour market at a very early age. (Nazlı, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

Similar results are found in studies from Türkiye (Akdeniz, 2016; Güler, 2020; Cengiz, 2020; Akdeniz, 2021). These studies also emphasize that asylum seekers work in unskilled or unskilled jobs. Also, the above statements indicate that adult asylum seekers have the potential to work in jobs that require physical strength. However, this is not sufficient for asylum seekers to be competitive in the labour market and to have stable employment. In particular, once they reach a certain age (e.g. 40 years of age), it may become difficult or impossible to work in jobs that require physical strength. It can be argued that this may further restrict asylum seekers' ability to find work. These statements add a new dimension to the difficulties faced by asylum seekers in finding a job in Türkiye, namely the age factor.

#### *Asylum Seekers cannot Practice their Own Professions.*

A professional explains that persons with international protection status in Türkiye do not work in the professions for which they were trained in their countries of origin, that they have to work in professions that require physical strength, and that they are therefore worn out and unemployed very early on:

There are very, very few people who are teachers, civil servants, nurses, etc. or who have a profession in their country and can do this profession in Türkiye. We see that they usually work as laborers in Türkiye (Emre, Male, Spirit of Solidarity).

At this point, the unqualification of the labour force can be considered. Regardless of status, it can be argued that this unqualification is extremely widespread, especially in the case of foreign labour. Research shows that a large proportion of migrants also work in destination countries in occupations that are very different from those for which they are trained or in which they have expertise (Akpınar, 2009; Dedeoğlu, 2011; Güzel, 2020). In a study on the quality of migrant labour, Ekiz Gökmen (2018) discussed the unqualification of highly educated migrants in low-status jobs regardless of their qualification level and underlined that this phenomenon is quite common. This result indicates that skilled human capital or human resources cannot be utilized in both origin and destination countries. This situation, especially for the countries of origin, may also mean that some structural problems that have existed for years and have become chronic may persist for generations.

*Asylum Seekers are Discriminated Against by Employers*

Although asylum seekers work in informal jobs with long working hours in return for low wages, their employers are ambivalent towards them in the employment process. Employers have a positive attitude towards asylum seekers if they are willing to work under the conditions offered to them and in the jobs they deem suitable for them, and negatively if the opposite.

Employers want people that they can pay less and utilize their power, so they want asylum seekers. The fact that the Turkish employee wants a higher salary causes employers to act as if they will hire a refugee, pay him/her less, and not insure him/her. Many employers do this. The employer thinks about his own economy, reducing his own costs and wants to do whatever he wants, whatever he sees fit (Kübra, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

As a result, it is understood that some employers have a positive approach towards asylum seekers who act in accordance with their wishes and meet their expectations; however, when the opposite is the case, they may take an opportunistic approach and adopt an anti-asylum seeker attitude.

## Misconceptions and Priority Issues in the Employment of Asylum Seekers<sup>8</sup>

In this study, it is aimed to determine the difficulties experienced by asylum seekers in Türkiye in accessing employment and the problems in employment. In addition, based on the primary data obtained, misconceptions and priority issues related to this issue were also revealed. In this section, the findings are presented in three different categories: (1) Asylum seekers do not occupy the jobs of Turkish people, (2) Women's disadvantages should not be forgotten and (3) Child labour should not be ignored.

### *Asylum Seekers do not Occupy the Jobs of Turkish People*

Studies on asylum seekers (including Syrians) in Türkiye (Kızmaz, 2018; Erdoğan, 2019; Erdoğan, 2020; Güler, 2020; Tümtaş, 2022) have found that local people fear that they will take away their jobs. Analyzing the news in press or media, it is noticeable that there are similar concerns about all types of foreigners (Özkan and Bayrakçıl, 2021). However, the fact that asylum seekers are usually employed in jobs that are not favored by the local community (Kızmaz, 2018; Güler, 2020) can be evaluated that these fears do not reflect reality. In fact, there are also statements from some professionals that support this assessment.

Refugees have developed some sectors with very serious employment deficits. Frankly speaking, for example, the furniture sector was about to end, they could not find staff. Now production has increased thanks to refugees. For example, the issue of shepherding, there was no agriculture and animal husbandry left in Türkiye, now there is an increased production in agriculture and animal husbandry with the work of refugees, there are Afghan shepherds or seasonal workers everywhere (Emine, Female, Beautiful Future).

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the complexity of status definitions in Türkiye, it was observed in interviews with professionals that the Syrians under temporary protection were often considered as asylum seekers. The main reason for this trend is thought to be the fact that almost everyone in the public opinion, except the experts/professionals on the issue, defines Syrians, Afghans, Iranians or Iraqis as asylum seekers or refugees in general.

Moreover, although Syrians in Türkiye are considered to be under temporary protection according to the national legislation in Türkiye, they are generally considered as asylum seekers who have not yet been granted refugee status according to international legislation, as the duration and scope of this protection is not yet fully clear. Since this field research was carried out within the scope of a European Union project, the groups in question were generally categorized as asylum seekers in accordance with international legislation. Therefore, it is requested that the term "asylum seeker" used in the rest of the study be made by taking into account the background stated so far.

One professional interviewed as part of the study explained that, contrary to popular belief, asylum seekers do not lead to an increase in unemployment in the host society and that asylum seekers make a significant contribution to the national economy by working in areas where Turkish citizens do not want to work or in jobs they do not want to do.

Since refugees generally have to work in professions that Turks don't want to work in, there is no such thing as taking jobs away from Turks. For example, they work a lot in sewage systems. Turks were not doing that job anyway. So there should be a study to show that refugees are not taking away their jobs. Because this is a very serious misperception (Oya, Female, Colour of the Earth).

*Women's Disadvantages Should not be Forgotten*

The increasing number of women involved in migratory movements brings discussions about the “feminization of migration” in the literature. However, the female subjects who must migrate are often ignored in these debates; the victimizations they experience are also intersectional. As mentioned earlier, asylum seekers face severe disadvantages, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes in the field of employment. However, women among asylum seekers face more problems/challenges than men (Biehl and Daniş, 2020). In fact, studies highlight that asylum-seeking women face more difficulties than asylum-seeking men in accessing and remaining in employment due to gendered perceptions and attitudes (Buz, 2006; Şeker and Uçan, 2016; Alacadağlı and Işıkçı Mamur, 2018).

Women don't open up much more than men, also because of their culture. This is a bit difficult. I mean, after some time has passed, I have had clients who struggled in this direction. She told her husband that she was going to work, but there is pressure from her husband to constantly prevent her and to use violence against her. Such situations prevent women who want to work from doing so (İlknur, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

The above-mentioned gender-based violence by asylum-seeking men is one of the findings of various studies in Türkiye (Uçar, 2020; Öztoraman-Adıgüzel and Tanyaş, 2020). This situation can be evaluated as the problem has a factual feature rather than a situational feature specific to this study.

The few female asylum seekers who enter the workforce are forced to work in more difficult conditions and for lower wages than men. Women may also choose strategies such as dropping out of the labour market because they work very long hours and in harsh conditions, but receive wages that do not cover even their basic living needs. Most of the time, however, they settle for low wages because they have no other option (Gözübüyük Tamer, 2019). A professional explained this situation in the following sentences.

There is also such a thing as cheap labour for refugee women. For example, we have heard that a woman works longer hours than a man and receives a lower salary. For this reason, we had clients who quit their jobs. It is not worth my effort (Elif, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

The fact that the husbands of some refugee women died in the conflicts in their countries - which was also the reason for migration - and various reasons such as family breakup or poverty caused by the migration process increase the vulnerability of refugee women. They are therefore exposed to gender-based harassment and assault by other men in their communities. The following is a professional's description of the harassment, etc. that women face in the workplace.

I would like to mention a few of my observations on women's employment. I observed that asylum-seeking women are subjected to a lot of discrimination in Türkiye, they are harassed at workplaces, they are forced to marry and they are constantly trying to find someone to marry (Azize, Female, Unlimited Volunteers).

Similar findings from various studies conducted in Türkiye (Sevlü, 2020; Çağlar Chesley, 2020) help to understand how widespread this problem is for asylum-seeking women. Also, there are analyses that argue that migration and the process of precariatization imply increased patriarchal control over women's labour (Dedeoğlu, 2019). For instance, a recent study conducted with Afghan asylum seekers shows that severe patriarchal norms, forced marriages and gender-based violence are still common phenomena in this community (Ünlütürk Ulutaş and Topaloğlu, 2023).

#### *Child Labour Should not be Ignored*

At this point, in addition to the importance and intersectionality of the victimization of asylum-seeking women, the situation of asylum-seeking children who are in or applying for the labour market should not be ignored (Bozok and Bozok, 2018; Temel and Topateş, 2023). In research on asylum seekers, it is often emphasised that the labour of everyone, including children like women, is seen as necessary for the family's financial survival (Dedeoğlu, 2019; Güler, 2020). Indeed, in the interviews with professionals in this research, it was frequently emphasized that asylum-seeking children are forced to work.

It is known that in asylum-seeking families, when parents or adults cannot find a job or do not have enough economic power to meet basic living expenses, children also have to work (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In other words, poverty also pushes some children into child labour and keeps them out of school. Professionals stated that this situation leads to school dropout and child labour in the following expressions.

Child labour is widespread, and we even hold seminars on combating it. When we ask families about this issue, we get answers like we are obliged to make our children work. We talk about legal sanctions and so on, but as I said, the lack of economic income pushes parents to do this. When the adult cannot find a job, the child is forced to work because the child can work more easily (Professional 1, Female).

In families where women asylum seekers are single parents, conditions become more difficult. In these families, the absence of another adult to do housework and look after children creates certain risks. Thus, children may leave their education unfinished and start working for different reasons such as internalising the gender norms that women are exposed to throughout their lives or not having the necessary strength or competence for the work demanded in the labour market.

The fact that women who are single parents cannot work for different reasons leads to child labour, which is another kind of vulnerability. For example, a woman who is a single parent may employ her child because she thinks that she cannot or should not work. We come across this a lot (Büşra, Female, Colour of the Sky).

As a final point, it could be inferred from the findings obtained so far and the results of various researches on the existing public perception that asylum seekers occupy the jobs of Turkish people or the local community does not reflect the reality; especially women and child asylum seekers face more difficulties in accessing employment and the problems in employment than the local community and male asylum seekers.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Employment is one of the most debated issues of the last two centuries. These debates continue with the thought patterns (capitalist and Marxist ideologies) of the class formations (bourgeois and labour) that emerged after the Industrial Revolution. However, in the 21st century, we are going through a process in which these class formations have differentiated/diversified or the lines between the classes have become blurred and ambiguous. This new class structure, which is called the precariat, is also used to define migrant, asylum seeker and refugee individuals in the labour market today, while it used to define workers working in uncontracted, precarious, discontinuous and part-time jobs.

According to the findings of the research, asylum seekers in Türkiye, like many other groups in the precariat class, are often forced to work in unregistered jobs, under harsh conditions, without any security, with a wage below the minimum wage, temporarily but for long hours. Moreover, they face significant barriers and hurdles to accessing the labour market, such as lack of language skills

and professional skills. It is understood that some asylum seekers have difficulties in receiving even their low wages and that there is no legal mechanism to which they can apply and claim their rights in such cases. The inability of asylum seekers to organize (not being able to establish unions, associations and similar structures) also reinforces these difficulties, problems and victimisation. One of the most striking results of the research is the finding that persons with international protection status are more disadvantaged in access to employment than those with temporary protection status. This finding is extremely valuable in terms of understanding how even a group categorised as asylum seekers can have a heterogeneous structure and different needs and exploring that disadvantaged groups also have more disadvantaged groups within themselves.

In conclusion, based on the findings obtained in the research; it is extremely important in terms of human rights, equality and social justice principles to make the necessary legal arrangements for persons under temporary protection status and persons with international protection status to have the same conditions in accessing the labour market. There is a general need to remove the requirement for all asylum seekers to apply for a work permit for any employment in order to facilitate access to employment, and if this is not possible, at least to end the requirement for employers to submit the applications. If the work permit application is to continue, it should be ensured that this permit is valid not only in the workplace where the permit is obtained but also in all workplaces in the same sector. Meanwhile, the requirement to wait six months for a work permit should be changed and at least the duration of the work permit should be increased from one year to three or five more years<sup>9</sup>. In terms of accessing to employment, the necessity to abolish the quota of foreign or asylum-seeking workers who can be employed in the same workplace should not be ignored. On the contrary, institutionalized medium and large-sized companies with more than a certain number of employees could be encouraged to set a quota for the employment of asylum seekers (e.g. 3%).

This is another important issue of unregistered employment and labour. It is recommended to increase public supervision and control to prevent unregistered work and to establish civilian and local teams in addition to this public system. As a result of combating this issue, in order to prevent unregistered work and child labour, vocational trainings for future professions or business lines can be provided in the organization of local administrations through national and international funds and contribution could be made to the creation of a qualified workforce.

Last but not least, it is suggested that regional or local employment offices should be established under the coordination of local administrations for the

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<sup>9</sup> These assessments and recommendations are based on the *International Labour Law No. 6735*, which has been in force since 2016 on the employment of asylum seekers.

sectors that are needed locally or regionally but where there is a shortage of labour force, and all those who demand access to employment should be directed to these sectors in a registered manner.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations, such as (1) the fact that only asylum seekers and professionals within the borders of Ankara province were interviewed; and (2) the data collection process was completed within a specific time period as part of an international project. These limitations are believed to have affected the research process in terms of conducting a more comprehensive fieldwork and exploring different experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Approval was obtained for this study from the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research and Publication of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University Social and Human Sciences. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

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#### *Author Contribution Statement*

Authors contributed to the manuscript equally.

#### *Conflicts of Interest*

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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### **Extended Abstract**

Due to its geographical location and as an inheritor of a former empire, Türkiye has been confronted with various asylum requests since its establishment. The period, which started with the protocol signed between Türkiye and Greece in 1923, continued over time with the migration of Turkish descendants from the former imperial territories who were pushed to Türkiye (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014; Sürmeli, 2016). In addition to these migratory movements based on kinship ties, there have been increasing individual and mass migratory movements to Türkiye from Iran after the 1979 revolution, from Iraq after the Gulf wars and the Halabja massacre, from Syria after the Arab Spring, and finally from Afghanistan after the



Taliban seized power in Afghanistan. Asylum seekers are primarily demanding that their need for security be met and that they be given the right to seek asylum.

Employment is an important factor in the integration or social cohesion of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. These groups could gain the economic strength to meet their own needs through employment and reduce the risk of tensions with the local community. Besides, employment allows asylum seekers to improve their language skills, build new social networks, and have a sense of belonging to the society. Therefore, it is very important for destination countries to regulate the labour market for asylum seekers and create inclusive legislation (Cheung and Phillimore, 2014; Aygül, 2018).

The aim of this study is to investigate the access to employment of asylum seekers in Türkiye and the difficulties and problems they face in doing so, as well as to evaluate the misconceptions and priorities on this issue. This qualitative research was conducted based on the principles of the phenomenological approach. This study sought to explore asylum seekers' difficulties in accessing employment through the experiences of both asylum seekers and professionals working with asylum seekers. It was conducted with persons having international protection and professionals working in different NGOs in Ankara. In accordance with the aim of the research, it was decided to use the purposive sampling method in this study.

The study's data was collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide created by the researchers. The semi-structured interview guide was created considering opinions from the literature and academics working in the field. After conducting the pilot interviews, the necessary changes were made. In addition to questions for warm-up and self-introduction, the participants were asked questions that would reveal in depth the difficulties they experienced in the field of employment.

The study presents its findings under three themes: (1) Challenges faced by asylum seekers in the labour market; (2) Problems in assessing employment from a professional perspective; and (3) Common misconceptions and priority issues in the employment of asylum seekers. These themes include a total of 16 sub-themes.

According to the research findings, asylum seekers in Türkiye, like many other groups within the class structure known as the precariat, are often forced to work in unregistered jobs, under harsh conditions, without any security, on a temporary basis, but with long working hours and earning below the minimum wage. They also face significant barriers to accessing the labour market, such as lack of language skills and professional qualifications. It is well known that some asylum seekers have difficulty obtaining even their low wages and that there is no legal mechanism to which they can turn and claim their rights in such cases. The inability of asylum seekers to form a union structure and organize compounds these difficulties, problems, and harassment. One of the most striking findings of the research is that persons with international protection status are more

disadvantageous in accessing employment than those with temporary protection status. This finding is extremely valuable in understanding how even a group categorized as asylum seekers can have a heterogeneous structure and different needs.

In conclusion, it is crucial to make the necessary legal arrangements for persons under temporary protection status and persons with international protection status to have equal access to the labour market. This is important in terms of human rights, equality, and social justice principles. There is a general need to remove the requirement for all asylum seekers to apply for a work permit for any employment in order to facilitate access to employment, and if this is not possible, at least to end the requirement for employers to submit the applications. If the work permit application is to continue, it should be ensured that this permit is valid not only in the workplace where the permit is obtained but also in all workplaces in the same sector. Meanwhile, the requirement to wait six months for a work permit should be changed and at least the duration of the work permit should be increased from one year to three or five more years. Regarding access to employment, the necessity to abolish the quota of foreign or asylum-seeking workers who can be employed in the same workplace should not be ignored. On the contrary, institutionalized medium and large-sized companies with more than a certain number of employees could be encouraged to set a quota for the employment of asylum seekers (e.g. 3%).

Unregistered employment and labour is a significant issue. In order to prevent unregistered work, it is recommended that public monitoring and control be strengthened and that civil and local teams be set up in addition to the public system. As a result of combating this issue, in order to prevent unregistered work and child labour, vocational trainings for future professions or business lines can be provided in the organization of local administrations through national and international funds and contribution could be made to the creation of a qualified workforce.

Finally, it is recommended that regional or local employment offices be established under the coordination of local administrations for sectors with local or regional demand but a shortage of labour force. All those seeking employment should be directed to these sectors in a registered manner.

## **Genişletilmiş Özet**

Türkiye hem coğrafi konumu hem de eski bir imparatorluk bakiyesi olması nedeniyle kurulduğu ilk yıllardan itibaren çeşitli sığınma talepleri/hareketleri ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. İlk olarak 1923 yılında Türkiye ile Yunanistan arasında imzalanan protokol ile başlayan süreç, zaman içinde eski imparatorluk coğrafyalarında bulunan ve baskı altında olan Türk soyluların Türkiye'ye göç etmeleriyle devam etmiştir (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2014; Sürmeli, 2016). Soydaşlık bağı esasına dayalı olarak gerçekleşen bu göç hareketlerine ek olarak 1979 Devrimi

sonrasında İran'dan; Körfez Savaşları, Halepçe Katliamı sonrasında Irak'tan; Arap Baharı sonrasında Suriye'den ve son olarak Taliban'ın Afganistan'da yönetimi ele geçirmesi sonrasında Afganistan'dan Türkiye'ye yönelik artarak devam eden bireysel ve kitlesel göç hareketleri gerçekleşmiştir. Sığınmacılar öncelikle güvenlik gereksinimlerinin karşılanması ve kendilerine sığınma başvurusu hakkı verilmesi talebinde bulunmaktadır.

İstihdam göçmen, sığınmacı ve mülteci grupların entegrasyonu ve/veya toplumsal uyumları açısından önemli bir faktördür. İstihdam söz konusu grupların kendi ihtiyaçlarını karşılayacak ekonomik güce ulaşmasını ve yerel toplum ile oluşabilecek gerilim riskinin azalmasını sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca sığınmacılar istihdam yoluyla dil pratiği yapabilmekte, yeni sosyal ağlara katılabilmekte ve kendilerini toplumsal hayatın bir parçası olarak hissetmektedirler. Bu yüzden bu gruplara yönelik hedef ülkelerin işgücü piyasasını düzenlemeleri ve kapsayıcı bir mevzuat oluşturmaları oldukça önemlidir (Cheung ve Phillimore, 2014; Aygül, 2018).

Bu çalışmada Türkiye'de bulunan sığınmacıların istihdama erişim durumları ile bu süreçte karşılaştıkları zorluk ve sorunların ele alınması, konuyla ilgili doğru bilinen yanlışların ve öncelikli hususların değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Bu nitel araştırma, fenomenolojik yaklaşım ilkelerine dayalı olarak yürütülmüştür. Bu çalışma, sığınmacıların istihdama erişimde yaşadıkları zorlukları hem sığınmacıların hem de sığınmacılarla çalışan profesyonellerin deneyimleri üzerinden keşfetmeyi amaçlamıştır. Araştırma, uluslararası koruma altındaki sığınmacılar ve Ankara'daki farklı sivil toplum kuruluşlarında (STK) çalışan profesyoneller ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın amacına uygun olarak bu çalışmada amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmasına karar verilmiştir.

Bu araştırmanın verileri, araştırmacılar tarafından oluşturulmuş yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yönergesi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilen derinlemesine görüşmelerle oluşturulmuştur. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yönergesi, literatür ve bu alanda çalışan akademisyenlerin görüşleri alınarak oluşturulmuştur. Pilot görüşmeler gerçekleştirildikten sonra gerekli değişiklikler yapılmıştır. Katılımcılara ısınma ve kendini tanıtırma soruları dışında istihdam alanında yaşadıkları zorlukları derinlemesine bir şekilde ortaya koyacak sorular yöneltilmiştir.

Bu çalışmada elde edilen bulgular (1) Sığınmacıların istihdam piyasasında karşılaştıkları zorluklar; (2) Profesyonel bakış açısıyla istihdam alanındaki sorunlar ve (3) Sığınmacıların istihdamı konusunda doğru bilinen yanlışlar ve öncelikli konular isimli üç tema altında sunulmuştur. Bu temaların altında toplam 16 alt temaya yer verilmiştir.

Araştırma bulgularına göre, Türkiye'deki sığınmacılar, prekaryalar olarak bilinen sınıfsal yapı içindeki diğer birçok grup gibi, genellikle kayıt dışı işlerde, ağır koşullar altında, herhangi bir güvence olmadan, geçici olarak, ancak uzun çalışma saatleri ve asgari ücretin altında kazançla çalışmak zorunda kalmaktadır. Ayrıca, dil becerilerinin ve mesleki niteliklerinin olmaması gibi işgücü piyasasına erişimde önemli engellerle karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bazı sığınmacıların düşük ücretlerini dahi

almakta zorlandıkları ve bu gibi durumlarda başvurabilecekleri ve haklarını arayabilecekleri yasal bir mekanizmanın bulunmadığı bilinmektedir. Sığınmacıların sendikal bir yapı oluşturamamaları ve örgütlenememeleri bu zorlukları, sorunları ve tacizleri daha da artırmaktadır. Araştırmanın en çarpıcı bulgularından biri, uluslararası koruma statüsüne sahip sığınmacıların geçici koruma statüsüne sahip olanlara göre istihdama erişimde daha dezavantajlı olmalarıdır. Bu bulgu, sığınmacı olarak kategorize edilen bir grubun bile nasıl heterojen bir yapıya ve farklı ihtiyaçlara sahip olabileceğini anlamak açısından son derece değerlidir.

Sonuç olarak, araştırmada elde edilen bulgulara dayanarak; geçici koruma statüsündeki sığınmacılar ile uluslararası koruma statüsündeki sığınmacıların işgücü piyasasına erişimde aynı koşullara sahip olmaları için gerekli yasal düzenlemelerin yapılması insan hakları, eşitlik ve sosyal adalet ilkeleri açısından son derece önemlidir. İstihdama erişimin kolaylaştırılması için tüm sığınmacıların herhangi bir işte çalışmak için çalışma izni başvurusunda bulunma zorunluluğunun kaldırılması, bu mümkün değilse en azından işverenlerin başvuru yapma zorunluluğuna son verilmesi gerekmektedir. Çalışma izni uygulaması devam ederse, bu iznin sadece iznin alındığı işyerinde değil, aynı sektördeki tüm işyerlerinde geçerli olması sağlanmalıdır. Bu arada, çalışma izni için altı ay bekleme zorunluluğu değiştirilmeli ve en azından çalışma izni süresi bir yıldan üç ya da beş yıl gibi daha uzun sürelere çıkarılmalıdır. İstihdama erişim açısından, aynı işyerinde çalıştırılabilecek yabancı veya sığınmacı işçi kotasının kaldırılması gerekliliği göz ardı edilmemelidir. Aksine, belirli bir sayının üzerinde çalışanı olan kurumsallaşmış orta ve büyük ölçekli şirketler, sığınmacı istihdamı için bir kota belirlemeye teşvik edilebilir (örneğin %3 gibi).

Kayıt dışı istihdam ve emek bir diğer önemli konudur. Kayıt dışı çalışmanın önlenmesi için kamusal kontrol ve denetiminin artırılması ve bu kamusal kontrol sistemine ek olarak sivil ve yerel ekiplerin kurulması önerilmektedir. Bu sorunla mücadele sonucunda kayıt dışı çalışma ve çocuk işçiliğinin önlenmesi için yerel yönetimlerin organizasyonunda ulusal ve uluslararası fonlar aracılığıyla geleceğin mesleklerine veya iş kollarına yönelik mesleki eğitimler verilebilir ve nitelikli işgücününün oluşturulmasına katkı sağlanabilir. Son olarak da yerel veya bölgesel olarak ihtiyaç duyulan; ancak işgücü açığı bulunan sektörler için yerel yönetimlerin koordinasyonunda bölgesel veya yerel istihdam ofisleri kurulması ve istihdama erişim talebinde bulunan herkesin kayıtlı bir şekilde bu sektörlerle yönlendirilmesi önerilmektedir.

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