

Some Reflections on Migration and its Effects on Host Country's Labour Market: Syrian Refugees in Turkey¹

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Abstract

Current civil war in Syria causes a mass population flow both within Syria and from there to out of Syria for a safety reason. Depending on the location of the turmoil in Syria map, Syrian passes the borders either with documented or undocumented. Of course the main destinations are safer neighbour countries. Currently Turkey has become the major host of Syrian refugees and according to the official figures around two million Syrian refugees are living in Turkey. This mass flow has produced so many problems such as living condition, broken families, lack of education for children, poverty and unemployment. This paper intends to make an introduction to the issue of the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Doing that I will present a brief theoretical explanation on why people migrate and then focus on Syria case, Syrian refugees in Turkey and their effects on labour market. Shortly, I can emphasise the lack of adequate data on that issue and the need more researches and data.

Keywords: Migration, Syrian Refugees in Turkey, Syrian Civil War

Introduction

According to a recent research report by ORSAM (Center For Middle Eastern Strategic Studies) (2015), Turkey hosts more than one and half millions refugees from its south border neighbouring country Syria, because of the on-going civil war that has emerged after the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East Region. This figure may reach over two million in unofficial publications. According to the government affiliated unit, AFAD (Prime Ministry Disaster & Emergency Management Presidency), more than two hundreds thousands refugees live in refugees camps located at the south provinces. But the rest of the immigrants have scattered often in these south cities and all over the other large cities in Turkey. Official figures on unemployment rates of the cities where the refugees' camps is located show that during the period of Syrian refugees flow to these cities, the unemployment figures has dramatically risen. For example, while the unemployment rates were 6,2 and 7,3 in 2012 respectively in Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır, two of the south cities, the figures have risen to 16,3 and 18,7 for these cities.

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So, this paper aims to discuss a fact which is a quite well-known one for Western European countries, and its effects on labour markets and everyday life discourse. I intend to present some reflections about Syrian migration and to portray the approaches toward Syrian immigrants.

The order of the paper will be as the following outline: At the beginning I try to put some information on the concepts about migration. Then, I supply some brief explanations that intend to explain the reasons for migration, in short I mention about some theoretical approaches. After that introductory base I focus on the case of Syria and the population flow to Turkey, their living condition, discriminations which they face in daily life and labour markets, their problematic juridical status according to legalisation in Turkey and the policies of Turkish government on this population.

Definitions and Concepts: Who are Migrants?

It's not easy to put a clear definition about the populations that move from one place to another internationally. There are several different concepts about that moving population in the migration literature such as migrant, refugee, displaced and diaspora. Putting the distinctions between those concepts are not my primary aim so, I talk over that population as a broad sense or sociological mean in that paper. Because the aim of the paper is not to put the legal status or definitions of a kind of population but their real condition in host country, in that case Turkey, especially the struggle that they face in the everyday life and labour market. Yet, in here I just state some definitions on the moving population briefly.

Beginning with the term migration, *International Organization for Migration* defines it as following (IOM, 2015): "The movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification." From that broad definition we can get some categories about migrants. So, the definition of migration supplies implications for migrant categories.

Stalker (refereed by Williams at al. 2013: 149) takes international migrants in five categories: (1) *settlers* (economic migrants and their families), (2) *professionals* (employed by multinational and other global organisations), (3) *temporary workers* (who are allowed to live and work temporarily in a country to meet labour market shortages, for example in seasonal jobs), (4) *refugees and asylum seekers* (fleeing from persecution and warfare in their home country) and (5) *unauthorized workers* (those without permission to enter or remain in a country, who are often described as illegal or undocumented immigrants). Some of these categories will constitute a basis for the case of this paper.

Naturally referring some other characteristic of migration, it's possible to produce different categories such Koser (2007: 16-17) does. He presents three main international migrants categories. The first of them stand on the distinction of 'voluntary' and 'forced' migrants. The people in the latter type (forced migrants) are those who have been forced to leave their own country for another, because of conflict, persecution or for environmental reasons such as drought or famine. Forced migrants are important category for this paper. Koser's second

category is about a distinction that is often made between people who move for political reasons and those who move for economic reasons. Also, the people who move for political reasons and forced migrants can be defined as refugees. When considering the aim of that paper, we need to emphasise the political reasons in this second category. And Koser's final distinction is between legal and illegal (or irregular) migrants. 'The concept of irregular migrants covers a wide range of people, principally migrants who enter a country either without documents or with forged documents, or migrants who enter legally but then stay after their visa or work permit has expired.'

When consider the migrant on that this paper focuses, there is not just one single category mentioned above. So, about the case of Syrian migrants we can refer the following categories: refugees, asylum seekers, unauthorised workers, forced migrants, migrants who have been moved for political reasons and finally irregular migrants. But when considering the legal framework about international population flows into Turkey, the case is not so simple such I present here. Sociologically we can define the population that flow into Turkey from Syria as migrant but not juristically. Thus, according to Turkish juridical framework there is no room or definition for Syrian migrants. Emphasising this important point, Al Jazeera Turk (2015) explain the lives of those people as 'suspended life'.

Theories of Migration: Why do People Migrate?

In fact we can conclude from the migrant categories explained above that there are different reasons for people to migrate. So there are also numerous theories that try to explain why people migrate. In here I'm going to present a short summary of these theories by following Stalker's sorting. Stalker (2008: 21-25) firstly divided the explanation on why people migrate into two main approaches: the *individual* and the *structural*. The approaches that share individual analysis 'regards each migrant as a rational human being who carefully weighs up the available options, and looks at the destinations that offer the highest wage rates and the best prospects of finding work'. So, the thing make people migrate is the thing calls their rational dimension and the conclusion is migration of those who are looking for their best choices.

On the other hand, the structuralist approach is quite different. 'In this view, the migrant is more like a ball in a pinball machine, knocked around by forces beyond his or her control. These forces could be economic, or social, or political – pushing people out of one country and pulling them towards another.' As Stalker (2008: 22) stated, structural forces in the sending country could be population pressure, or land shortage, or gender discrimination or as for the case in this paper it could be a political turmoil. And the structural forces in the receiving country could be a shrinking population, or a shortage of people to work on the land or the demand for domestic servants, or as for the case in this paper it could be just a geographical position and security.

The migration literature supplies so many categorisations on the question of why people migrate. The common tendency in the literature is to present the all theories from the neoclassical economics approaches to approaches from new economy. So, while some of these theories are macro ones which focus on geographic differences in the supply of and demand for labour, the others are micro ones that focus on a cost-benefit calculation of individuals as

rational actors (Massey and al. 1993). On the other hand new economics of migration consider not only the labour market as reasons to migrate, but also conditions of other markets, such as the capital market or unemployment insurance market. It views migration as a household strategy to minimize family income risks or to overcome capital constraints on family production activities. Decision-making models consider a variety of factors influencing migration decision, but still remain in the push-pull framework (Thieme, 2006: 36-40).

Finally we need to remember dual labour market theory and world system theory in migration literature because they are both widely used to explain why people migrate in this literature. As Thieme (2006) stated, Dual labour market theory links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies and World systems theory sees migration as a natural consequence of economic globalization and market penetration across national boundaries.

But the migration of Syrian people to Turkey (as well as to other countries that share the same borders) is far from to be an economic-oriented population movement. This movement emerged from an extraordinary political turmoil in Syria and its terrible consequences. Thus, the rest of the paper will focus on this population flow by present the reasons of this flow and its outcomes in Turkey.

A Closer Looking at Syrian Migration

In around four years Syria has turned completely different place from a non-democratic but steady point to a completely chaotic place on where a civil war occurs and millions of people displaced and hundreds of thousands lost their lives. At the end of the year of 2010 (December 17), a young graduate who selling vegetables, Mohamed Bouazizi had set fire to himself in protest after police seized his cart in Tunisia. Bouazizi died in the beginning of the 2011, January 4 but this case has given a start huge protest movements in most of the Arab countries, generally called as Arab Spring, and a political, social and economic turmoil process in these country that still is ongoing (for details see BBC News 2015; Blight and al. 2012; Reuters 2010). Uprising wave has reached Syria in March 2011 when pro-democracy protests erupted in the city of Deraa after the arrest and torture of some teenagers who painted some revolutionary slogans on a school wall. BBC News (2015) goes on as:

“After security forces opened fire on demonstrators, killing several, more took to the streets. The unrest triggered nationwide protests demanding President Assad's resignation. The government's use of force to crush the dissent merely hardened the protesters' resolve. By July 2011, hundreds of thousands were taking to the streets across the country. Opposition supporters eventually began to take up arms, first to defend themselves and later to expel security forces from their local areas.”

This was the beginning of the current civil war in Syria. Our main purpose in that paper is not to present a comprehensive analysis of Syrian civil war or of Arab Spring but a specific conclusion of this uprising, a social dimension, the population displaced, its flow and its effects on target country, in that case Turkey.

According to activists and UN, reported by BBC News (2015), by June 2013, 90.000 people had been killed in the conflict. However, by August 2014 that figure had more than doubled to 191.000 – and continued to climb to 220.000 by March 2015. Since the start of the conflict, around 4 million people have fled Syria, most of them women and children. This is one of the largest refugees exoduses in recent history. Liz Hummer (2015) defines this huge exodus as the worst one since the Rwandan genocide 20 years ago. According to a recent report by SCPR (2015) together with 840.000 people who were wounded 6 per cent of the population were killed, maimed or wounded during the conflict. “Equally horrendous is the silent disaster that has reduced life expectancy at birth from 75.9 years in 2010 to an estimated 55.7 years at the end of 2014, reducing longevity and life expectancy by 27 per cent.”

All these figures are very clear explanations on the reason of Syrian population movements. The same report states (SCPR, 2015) that the population of Syria fell from 20.87 million persons in 2010 to just 17.65 million people by the end of 2014. More than half of the Syrian population were dislodged as they left their homes looking for safer places to live or better living conditions elsewhere. 6.8 million persons from this population-in-movement continue to live in Syria as internally displaced persons, with many displaced numerous times. The report emphasises that refugees from Syria now constitute the second largest refugee population in the world with an estimated 3.33 million refugees fleeing Syria by the end of 2014. And the final figure from the report we present here is about the refugees number in different neighbour countries. According to report during the past year Turkey displaced Lebanon as the major host of Syrian refugees, with 35.1 per cent of refugees sheltering there, compared to 34.5 per cent in Lebanon. Jordan hosted 18.7 per cent of Syrian refugees, while Iraq hosted 6.9 per cent.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

At the beginning I need to state that there is a definition problem for the population flow from Syria to Turkey at the moment. As stated by UNCHR in an Introductory Note (2010): “Grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of human rights 1948, which recognizes the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution in other countries, the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951, is the centrepiece of international refugee protection today.” Turkey has also acceded to the agreement but with a ‘geographical limitation’, that means Turkey just accepts the refugees coming from Europe. This limitation revealed a great legal gap clearly during population flows to Turkey after the recent conflict in the south border neighbours.

Absent protection for those who coming from outside Europe forced Turkey to make some legal arrangement and it made the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Act No. 6458). And the guidelines of this act outed in October, 2014. These regulations present protection for the population from Syria but this protection is not permanent, it’s a temporary protection. Nevertheless this Act and its guideline include important terms, such as Article no. 29 of the guideline for this paper. This article includes the following regulations: (a) Procedures and principles of working life for those who are protected temporary are determined by Cabinet. (b) Those who have the temporary protection ID card can apply to Ministry of Labour and Social Security to work in certain sectors, business and geographic areas that determined

by Cabinet. (c) The duration of work permit given to the permanent protected cannot be longer than the duration of permanent protection. Of course these statements are important because they mention about some regulations for working life such as work permit and ID card, but on the other side these regulations are also far from to construct quite a safe frame about living and working life. Primarily, despite of these limited regulations, the status of population from Syria is not absolutely clear. As stated above, a documentary by Al Jazeera Turk defines the life of these people as 'suspended life'.

After this short introduction on ambiguity of the status of Syrian population in Turkey, I want to try to present some figures about this population flow and its relation with the labour market in Turkey. Because of an ongoing flowing process the number of refugees (I used this term not as a legislation one but a sociological one) is not fixed and not exact. According to recent figures of UNHCR (the UN Refugee Agency) (2015), the number of registered refugees hosted by Turkey is 1.758 million individuals. Similar figure is being also presented by AFAD (an institution for disaster and emergency management affiliated to Turkish Prime Ministry) (see. afad.gov.tr). But because of the difficulties on registration of this population, the forecasting about Syrian refugees varies between 2 and 3 million and sometimes it can be more than 3 million. 250 thousand of these people live in refugees' camps while the rest of the population live in different cities all over Turkey, especially in those located in South part of the Turkey, near Syria border. In any case all these figures imply quite a huge population for both sending and host countries.

Now I would like to focus on labour markets in Turkey and try to think about the effects of this population flow on the market. According to TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute) the population of Turkey for 2014 is 77,695 million (see turkstat.gov.tr). TUIK also broadcasts labour force statistics monthly and in April 15, 2015 it broadcasted labour force statistics of January 2015 period. According to this data, unemployment rate realized as 11.3 %; employment rate realized as 44.3 %; labour force participation rate realized as 50 % and the rate for unregistered employment realized as 32.4 % (TUIK, 2015).

As it can be seen from the official statistics the unemployment rate (average of OECD countries is 7 %) and unregistered employment rate are quite high while employment rate (average of OECD countries is 66%) and labour force participation rate (average of OECD countries is 71 %) are low when comparing with the OECD countries (see stats.oecd.org). Thus, there is great potential for a negative perception against and a danger for Syrian refugees. As elsewhere in the world, the native unemployed see the refugees as the main reason for their unemployment. On the other hand in a labour market where the high unregistered employment is common, hiring these people for a quite low wages is so easy and possible. Indeed a study by Akdeniz (2014) and so many news in nationwide and local news media show numerous case in which Syrian refugees work for a quite low wage that is half and sometimes less than half of a native worker's wage.

According to a report by AFAD (2013) around three quarters of the refugees who live out of the camps are looking for a job. When adding the demographic properties of the refugees on that picture, the pressure on labour market became clear. According to a report by USAK (referred by Şirin, 2014) the education level of these people is not less than the Turkey's average. That

means this population can supply both skilled and unskilled labour to labour market. This fact might be seen by native workforce as a threat. And the rise of workforce in a short period has increased potential for unregistered employment because of Syrian refugees.

Unfortunately any data about the effects of Syrian refugees on labour markets in Turkey is unavailable. Thus, we can just make a limited analysis by indirect data from different sources. While this paper is being written, the unemployment rates for the year of 2014 specifically for cities have not been broadcasted yet. Using this employment data by TUIK, Yavuz (2014) present a short analysis on unemployment rates for the cities of Turkey that are geographically near Syria. According to these data unemployment rates in some cities that are near Syria and that host a great Syrian population have doubled in two years. For example, unemployment rate in Şanlıurfa, a border city, has been 16,3 % in 2013, while it was just 8 % in 2011. Another cities are also show the similar trends: While unemployment rates had been 14,1 % for Batman City, 12 % for Şırnak City and 12,4 for Osmaniye City in 2011, these rates respectively increased to 23,4 %, 20,1 % and 14 % in the year of 2013.

Of course there is no official statistics still that directly present the effect of Syrian migration on labour market but as in these figures some conclusions could be derived from this population movement. As stated above most of the refugees are looking for a job which means the extent of workforce must have increased in a quite short period. And most probably this state might have resulted in high unemployment rate for some cities that mentioned above. Deepen analysis and making the statements more clear we need further researches and some macro official figures.

Some Concluding Remarks

Several research reports on population movement from Syria to Turkey have been published recently (e.g. see, AFAD 2013, AI 2015, ORSAM 2015, SCPR 2015, ORSAM 2014). Yet still, we are far away from a fully understanding on Syrian refugees. On the other hand the literature on that issue is extending rapidly every passing day. In a conclusion part of a short paper we can stress several remarks. First of all the case we are examining here has *sui generis* properties. The main motive under that mass migration is not economical but about safety living condition because of a civil war that still is ongoing in Syria. Of course this property can be found in elsewhere in the World for some migration movement but the extent of that case is quite impressive.

Another issue is about the statuses of these people. Despite of some initiatives for migrant people the statuses of Syrian in Turkey is not clear because of Turkey's current legal framework for migrants. This issue have some conclusions for labour markets. Syrian who has not clear status in Turkey could not find a chance for a registered job. Thus almost all of these people who want to work are ready to work in an undeclared job or in informal economy. On the other hand employers in such an economy hire these people for a quite low wage. Some cases that appeared in news portals or dailies show that employers hire these refugees for a half-wage or less (sometimes one third or one fourth). This reality demonstrates some implies about the lives of Syrian who are in labour market in Turkey.

There is also an important implication for unemployment in Turkey. Unemployment issue has always been a major problem for Turkey and currently this is especially obvious. According to some limited and indirect figures Syrian people in Turkish labour market have increased labour supply and consequently unemployment rate in several cities that located geographically close to Syria border. Finally, we need to stress the fact that putting the picture about the migration from Syria and its economic and social conclusion on the table clearly we have not sufficient data yet and we need further researches to find out more another implications that arise from that mass population movement.

About the Author

Fuat Man received his Ph.D. degree from labour economic and industrial relations field. His Ph. D. dissertation is on labour movements and its relations to politics in Turkey. His academic interests are sociology of work, labour relations, industrial relations and social policy. His work titled *Labour Ideology of State in Turkey* has been published in Turkish language. He also translated some papers and a book on work sociology and labour issues to Turkish. The themes available in his studies: labour ideology of modernity, history of labour, labour movement in Turkey and precarisation in working life.

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