

EFFECTS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES ON TURKISH ECONOMY

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Abstract

It is a prominent issue to evaluate the impact of refugee inflows on Turkish labor market conditions since a more Syrians took refuge in Turkey. It should also be noted that refugee inflows should be considered with negative impacts on Turkish workers, especially those working in informal jobs (especially women), low-educated and agricultural workers. In this article, the level of Turkish employment of refugees should be evaluated together with immigration in terms of the effects of labor force and related markets. Displacement of Turkish workers due to Syrian refugees has brought more negative effects. Even if employment rates decrease due to the arrival of refugees, unemployment rates are also decreasing at roughly the same rate. It is another data that women are subject to huge reductions in formal and regular employment versus unregistered employment and fieldwork. The resulting increase in average wages is probably since those experiencing wage losses are leaving the labor market. Correspondingly, the growing demand for higher quality formal jobs filled by Turkish workers requires a re-evaluation of allowing refugees to take part in the formal labor market in relation to the potential impact of work allows. The claim that collecting data about the Syrian refugee community should be a priority is the most common issue in the literature and needs concrete solutions. In this article, which examines the arrival of refugees in Turkey, the employment and employee rates in Turkey, as well as the market effects, not only the problems caused by the refugees are discussed, but also the solution proposals are outlined.

Keywords: *Syrian Refugees, Refugees and the Market, Effects of Refugees on the Economy, Effects of Syrian Refugees.*

1. Introduction

Unfortunately, available resources and data on Syrian refugees' access to the Turkish labor market are insufficient. The economic contribution of Syrians in the context of the new

investments through savings in the country requires an input-output approach (IO)¹. So, further implications arise when the cross-sectoral linkages of the Turkish economy are clearly considered²:

- *The total value-added created by Syrian refugees in the Turkish economy is equivalent to 1.96 % of the total Turkish GDP.*
- *The production effect is assumed to cause an increase of TL 30.59 billion in production and TL 20.9 billion in value added in different sectors.*
- *The effect of stimulated demand accounts for 0.45 % of GDP. This effect means a new production that creates an added value of about TL 6.2 billion. This is mainly generated by the direct consumption and investment of the Syrian population and is estimated at 0.3% of GDP.*
- *As a result, the domestic employment created by Syria's economic integration (through production and demand effects) reaches 150 thousand people.*
- *The direct effects of Syria's economic integration, reflected in the production effects of Syrian workers and specific consumption and investment patterns, influence not only Turkish business and economic policies, but also more other data.*
- *Another point of discussion is the idea that increasing the employment opportunities of refugees by improving their education and skills, increasing their entrepreneurial abilities, and granting work allows in certain sectors will further increase the contribution of refugees to economic growth.*

2. Syrian Refugees in Turkey

When the crisis about Syrian refugees began, Turkey's first response included short-term contingency planning to supply shelter and food to the refugees. Syrian refugees in Turkey were officially accepted as "guests." Based on this policy, they were granted temporary residency status. Turkey has long looked to align its migration policy with that of the EU. Since the Syrian crisis, migration policy has become a priority and Turkey has focused on building the legal and institutional infrastructure for migration management (Bayaner et al., 2016). Turkey has been

¹ Long-Term Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy (FEM43-05 report), AGREEM – Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain; CREM, Akdeniz University, Turkey.

² “Long-Term Impact of Syrian Refugees on Turkish Economy: An Input-Output Simulation”.

at the center of international negotiations and agreements on how to deal with the situation. Due to the compulsory entry of refugees, a considerable number of Syrian refugees are expected to stay permanently in Turkey, making their integration into society an urgent issue (Knappert et al., 2017). Immigrant integration includes access to the labor market, health and education services, social inclusion and active citizenship in the host country (EUROSTAT, 2016). And then the Turkish government has announced its intention to grant citizenship to Syrian refugees. Although the issue of granting citizenship leads to heated debates in the country, this proposal is a new and crucial step in Turkey's integration policy (Bayaner et al., 2016). Under the Social Cohesion Program, which was started in Turkey to supply financial support to refugees, especially Syrians, about 1 million people per year received a Red Crescent debit card³.

3. Unemployment In Regional Labor Markets

The number of unemployed in regional labor markets related to Syrian refugees was identified as a statistically significant influencing factor. During and after the 2008 global fiscal crisis, the unemployment rate in Turkey was quite high, especially in lesser provinces⁴. However, the regional refugee variable is significant and has a statistically positive sign, showing that regions with a high density of Syrian refugees have higher unemployment. It is no coincidence that the refugee density variable shows that as the educational level of the labor force increases, the number of unemployed also increases. Unfortunately, unemployment rates are also high at the tertiary level. The Turkish labor market is characterized by high youth unemployment. The Turkish economy cannot absorb all graduates in most years, and young people, especially graduates, make considerable efforts to find jobs⁵. As the Syrian conflict dragged on, Turkey's position changed. Using panel data at the regional level, different regression models for unemployment, formal and informal employment are proposed to show the impact of Syrian refugees on regional labor markets.

4. Results In Terms of Employment

³ Refugees in Turkey have now survived with financial aid worth about TL 640 million (TÜRK KIZILAYI, 2017).

⁴ The sign of this coefficient is negative, showing the positive effect of Syrian refugees on the labor market in reducing unemployment.

⁵ At the beginning of the influx of Syrian refugees, Turkey assumed and took the official position that the refugees were temporary and would return to Syria once the conflict was settled.

Unemployment was found to be higher in regions with a high density of Syrian refugees. Similarly, high density of Syrian refugees was found to reduce both formal and informal employment⁶. The impact of Syrian refugees on Turkey's regional labor markets is complex, multi-faceted, and variable. The increased demand for goods and services, or for the goods and services needed to supply them, is likely to affect both formal and informal labor markets. In addition, internal migration has developed in the regions most affected by Syrian refugees. Future analyzes on this issue should therefore consider the dynamic nature of the impacts and try to separate the short-term impacts from the medium-term impacts where possible. Overall, migration could prove positive. However, the Turkish economy is currently not strong enough to absorb this increase in the labor force. Although the Syrian population is now more geographically dispersed in Turkey, there are still many people who living places close to the border.

5. The Largest Refugee-Hosting Country in The World

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends report, the number of people forced to migrate is the highest number of displaced people ever. The main reason for the huge increase in refugee numbers is the Syrian civil war⁷. 47 percent of Syrian refugees live in Turkey for a long time. Turkey has had an open-door policy since the civil war began. Since then, more studies have analyzed and reported on the political and social impact of Syrian refugees (Dinçer et al. 2013; Kirişci, 2014; İçduygu, 2015). Turkey's demographic window of opportunity refers to the period when a country's working-age population is large compared to the dependent population it needs to support. The literature points out that this is often the case when birth rates decline as a country develops, but the elderly population is not yet exceptionally large. There is also a wealth of literature in the textbook models which says that migration increases labor supply and decreases employment

⁶ Earlier articles analyzing the first years of the Syrian refugee crisis noted a positive impact on formal employment. In the early years of the crisis, when most Syrian refugees are living in refugee camps, the impact on formal employment is likely to be mainly positive, as the construction and operation of refugee camps is a labor-intensive undertaking.

⁷ 8 million Syrians were displaced within the country and 5.1 million left the country and became refugees (International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2016). Three million Syrian refugees have arrived in Turkey. This makes Turkey the largest refugee-receiving country in the world.

and wages, implying that it has little or no effect on employment or wages⁸ ⁹. Akgündüz et al. (2015) examined the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis in southeastern Turkey on prices, employment rates, and internal migration using fixed effect differential models and found that the refugee influx causes an increase in food and housing prices. Their findings that internal migration to the affected areas decreased but had no effect on employment suggest that the explanation for the absence of an employment effect is the slowdown of internal migration as a stabilizing factor. Bahçekapılı and Çetin (2015) also supplied a descriptive analysis of the effects on the unemployment rate, inflation, foreign trade, and internal migration before and after the influx of Syrian refugees¹⁰.

Ceritoğlu et al. (2017) and Tümen (2016) compared refugee inflows with labor market outcomes before and after the refugee influx, using a micro-level data set from a household survey¹¹. Stave and Hillesund (2015), on the other hand, find that Syrian refugees compete with Jordanians for low-skilled and low-paid jobs in the informal sector and report higher unemployment rates after the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis. Regions near the border are the most affected by the Syrian refugee crisis. According to Ceritoğlu et al. (2017) and Tümen (2016), although the results differed, the other studies mentioned above found possible differences in methodology for aggregate data at the region level.

6. Reported Impact of Refugee Influx on Labor Markets

The reported effects of the refugee influx on labor markets are summarized in an analysis of the Turkish Household Labor Force Surveys, which does not capture the informal economy¹². All regressions include fixed effects for age, education, and marital status (with comparable results when excluded), although there are more studies that have specifically examined the impact of refugees on formal and informal employment, hours, and wages. However, unlike for

⁸ So, the literature on the labor market effects of what we call forced migration is insignificant compared to the relevant literature on "voluntary" migration.

⁹ Del Carpio and Wagner (2015) argue that the arrival of refugees is a supply shock in the informal sector and a demand shock in the formal sector. They also found that the average wage in the informal sector fell, but that refugees did not have a significant impact on the average wage in the formal sector.

¹⁰ Syrian refugees are reported to have increased unemployment and lowered prices in the regions most affected by the crisis. For the earlier period, we use data from 2010 to 2012, and for the next period, we use data from 2013 to 2014. The analyzes are descriptive and therefore do not control for other effects that could account for price differences before and during the Syrian refugee crisis.

¹¹ Jordan has also received more refugees. Fakih and Ibrahim (2016) found no effect of Syrian refugees on the Jordanian labor market.

¹² Blessing or Burden? The Impact of Refugees on Businesses and the Informal Economy, Onur Altındag, Ozan Bakis, Sandra Rozo.

men, the negative impact of refugee inflows on women's employment is mainly due to formal employment.

Causal Effects

Using the annual Household Labor Force Surveys at the micro level, we examined the causal effects of this influx on the labor market outcomes of Turkish nationals¹³. Considering the information behind the migration decision, we analyze the migration effect in two separate categories. The first migration to the border regions is defined as primary migration, and since the first inflow to the border regions is purely exogenous, certain methods and strategies have been applied to estimate the impact on the labor market in these regions. One of the results of these data is that migration from primary regions to landlocked regions depends on internal selection. Therefore, it would be correct to define it as secondary migration. To compensate for the selection bias, we follow Card's (2009) approach that migration and less experienced individuals have a negative impact on employment and wages. The decline in wages of informally employed workers turns out to be the main factor behind the negative wage effects. Consequently, there are statistically significant negative wage effects for low-skilled and less experienced workers.

7. A Brief Analysis

Since 2011, a study has analyzed the effects on inflation, unemployment rates, economic development, and housing demand¹⁴. "The impact of Syrian refugees on the Turkish economy," "Is migration an economic and demographic solution to the aging population and labor force due to sectoral supply constraints?" or "Can migration be considered a risk due to the additional burden on social savings and public finances?" or "What is the reason for the general price level and rising unemployment?"¹⁵ This gives rise to questions such as these: According to the results, although there is no negative impact on the Turkish economy in the short term, the assumption that there will be a negative impact in the long term is not accidental. For example,

¹³ The impact of the Syrian refugee influx on domestic workers in Turkey: An ethnic settlement approach, Author links open overlay panel, Yusuf Kenan Bağır.

¹⁴ The Economic Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy, Year 2021, Vol 23, No 3, 1151 - 1171, 30.09.2021, Oya Kaya , Üzeyir Aydın.

¹⁵ The related study examined and analyzed the number of Syrian refugees between 2012 and 2019, economic growth, unemployment rate, housing demand, and general price level based on quarterly data. All statistical information on Syrian refugees was obtained from UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK).

the increase in refugee numbers has a significant impact on the unemployment rate and even has a horizontal effect on inflation and housing demand.

8. The Perspective of the Other Countries

All host countries fear that the integration of Syrian refugees into the formal labor market will lead to higher unemployment and lower wages for their citizens. However, these fears appear to be unfounded. Recent research on the economic impact of Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon shows that refugees have negligible impact on economic growth or unemployment. Research from Turkey shows that Syrian refugees have displaced poor Turks working in the informal sector, but more of them have later moved into the formal sector, effectively improving the economy. However, the complexity of all data and outcomes should also be assessed by COVID. Notwithstanding this, increasing amounts of international funding are being diverted from supporting long-term care for refugees and care to meeting real needs in responding to COVID. Evidence suggests that Syrian refugees are particularly hard hit by the economic impact of the COVID response and experience higher levels of unemployment and poverty than people in the host society¹⁶.

The natural registration of all Syrian refugees in Turkey does not have a statistically significant impact on formal employment. However, the increasing density of Syrian refugees should be further investigated in future studies in terms of the robustness of possible effects. Del Carpio and Wagner (2015) report that Syrians have a positive impact on the formal labor market. They estimate that for every ten Syrian workers in the informal labor market, three or four jobs are created in the formal labor market. When Del Carpio and Wagner (2015) published their paper, Syrians were not yet allowed to work in Turkey, but the indirect impact on the formal labor market was acknowledged by the authors¹⁷. The variable on refugee density is different only for the southeastern regions and Istanbul. Originally, more of the Syrian population lived in camps and towns near refugee camps. Today, Syrian refugees live in all corners of Turkey and in major cities where they can find more jobs. The positive impact on formal employment seems to be mainly due to new government or municipal jobs created to cope with the problems of

¹⁶ Elizabeth Ferris, Research Professor at International Migration Institute of Georgetown University.

¹⁷ An earlier article using data up to 2015 found that refugee density has a positive effect on formal employment (Oğuş Binatlı and Esen, 2016).

housing large numbers of refugees, especially in refugee camps¹⁸. The size of the informal economy in Turkey is considered large, with estimates ranging from 7% to 139% of the formal economy (Akalin and Kesikoğlu 2007; Çetintaş and Vergil 2003; Sarılı 2002). A separate study examined the impact of Syrian refugees on unregistered employment in regional labor markets in terms of the number of college-educated workers and the growth rate of the Turkish economy and found a negative impact on the future college-educated workforce.

9. Conclusion

The civil war that began in Syria in 2010 led to a significant wave of migration in the region. More of Syria's neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, received large numbers of immigrants. This necessary influx, initially seen as temporary, has become a major economic, political and social problem as internal conflicts in Syria have intensified. A substantial proportion of refugees live in camps near the Syrian border and in large cities and towns near the camps. Based on this information summarized in our study, the negative impact of Syrian immigrants on the Turkish economy will be greater in the future than it is today. Although the damage that immigrants will inflict on Turkey and its economy is clear from the data, important policy measures must be taken to address the negative impacts in the future. Policymakers need to urgently address these issues based on novel studies and updated data that complement existing studies in the literature on this topic.

¹⁸ The population in refugee camps is no longer increasing, so this effect has likely weakened. However, the Syrian population is also creating demand for goods and services. This may have had a positive impact on the formal labor market.

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