



## International Migration, Xenophobia and Migrant Employment in Rural Areas: Konya Example

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the problems arising from that the agricultural sector has become a significant employment area for migrant labor due to migrant migration. The presence of migrant labor in the agricultural sector has increased because of the cost advantages provided by agricultural operators of cheap labor supply despite informal working conditions. Migrant labor has crucial contributions to the sustainability of production activities, especially in the agricultural sector, where the local labor does not want to be employed. However, the perspective of local people toward migrants differs over time, especially due to different social and cultural characteristics. Since these differences are more noticeable in small settlements, such as rural areas people who are migrant to society or national identity become unwanted in the living spaces of local people over course of time, this study aimed to determine the perspective toward migrant labor and to evaluate the impact of this situation on the sustainability of production. In line with the results obtained, policy recommendations were made for the integration of migrant labor and the planning of agricultural activities.

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## Introduction

Migration has significant impacts on agricultural production both regarding the location and the source of migration. In areas of migration, basic problems may occur, such as sharing - resources and welfare, increase in labor stock, change in demographic structure, social and cultural transformations, and growing demand in food. In areas that are the source of migration, especially labor loss in the agricultural sector, brings problems, such as food security, sustainability of production, and idle capital and natural resources. Therefore, it is possible to say that the overall impact of migration is complex. Regarding rural development, nutrition, food security, agricultural capacity and the wider rural economy, migration can have lasting effects in both destination and origin areas (Moore, 2020). While migration movements at the international level are examined, we can see that migration flows are estimated to have displaced around 281 million people in 2020 worldwide, representing 3.60% of the world's population. The continents of Europe (87 million) and Asia (86 million) are the areas where migration movements are concentrated; these continents constitute %61 of the international immigrant stock. (IOM, 2021).

From 2000 to 2020 with %74, the highest immigrant population was reached in the Asia (Approximately 37 million people in absolute terms.) In Europe, there was an increase of 30 million international migrants during this period (IOM, 2021). Asia reached a total migrant population of 85.6 million in 2020 (Figure 1).

Although the number of international migrants is 3.60% of the world population, there are significant differences in the migrant population according to countries. In countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, more than 88% of the population is international migrants. In 2020, Türkiye hosted more than 3.6 million refugees, mostly Syrians, making it the world's largest refugee host country (IOM, 2021). When the migrant population is included, Türkiye can be defined as an important center for international migration.

Increasing migration on a global scale represents a quantitative change for nations and a social transformation. In addition to ethnic and religious conflicts occurring in different countries, wars, economic instability, the desire to receive good education; natural events also cause an increase in migration (Ceki Hazan, 2016; Kaldık, 2021; Şengül, 2022).

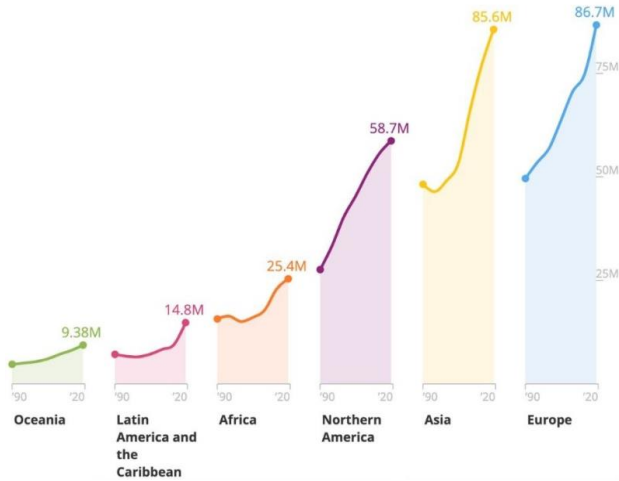


Figure 1. Change in International Migrant Population by Continent

When incoming and outgoing migration statistics are analyzed, it is determined that 667 billion people migrated to Türkiye as of 2019. Of the migrants in Türkiye, 578,488 are migrant nationals. Of these, 14.50% are citizens of Iraq, 13.80% of Turkmenistan, 8.20% of Afghanistan, 7.50% of Syria and 7.30% of Iran (TURKSTAT, 2023). Civil wars in their own countries, the desire to change their living standards, economic reasons, and the aim of migrating to Europe cause these people to migrate to Türkiye. In short, many people with different ethnic origins, beliefs, cultures, and social structures have come together in Türkiye. As a result, not only the social structure is differentiated, but also social cohesion problems come to the fore. Therefore, the local population may develop different attitudes and behaviors toward people who affect their lives for economic, social, and cultural reasons. In this direction, attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude and often vilify people who are migrant to society or national identity or who are perceived to be migrant are expressed as xenophobia (Asia-Pacific NGO Meeting for The World Conference, 2001; Özmete et al., 2018). In general, xenophobia is a controversial issue due to the different meanings attributed to the concept of “migrants” (UNHCR, 2015). Xenophobia appears to be a rising attitude in Türkiye (Padır, 2019). The arrival of migrants to the destination or transit country may be accepted with tolerance at first, and in course of time, migrants may be seen as a threat. In this process, the occurrence of threats, violence, anger, hostility, verbal and physical abuse against migrants can be defined as xenophobia (Lesetedi & Modie-Moroka 2007; Öztürk, 2020).

According to sectoral figures, 66.20% of migrant workers work in the service sector, 26.70% in industry and 7.10% in agriculture (ILO, 2022). However, the agricultural sector, due to its structural characteristics and informal dimension, is the first step for people entering countries through external migration to join the labor market and is thought to enable the employment of more people due to informality. Migrant labor creates a demand for cheap labor in agriculture and construction and fills the gap when domestic labor is not available (Toksöz 2008; Toksöz et al. 2012). Migrant labor employed in agriculture has an important potential for participation in seasonal agricultural production by producers and subcontractors in

terms of creating an informal and cheap labor supply (Bayramoğlu & Bozdemir, 2019). It is difficult to determine the number of migrant labor employed in the agricultural sector due to informal working conditions. However, the proportion of migrant labor has been determined by micro-scale studies across Türkiye. Within the scope of interviews with 76 families of seasonal agricultural workers in Kayseri in 2020, it was determined that 46.10% of the labor was migrant. Of the migrant labor, 62.90% are Syrian, 31.40% Afghan and 5.70% Iraqi (Şahin, 2022). Within the scope of the study conducted with 375 enterprises in Konya province, it was determined that 77.24% of the labor was non-enterprise labor and 22.76% was family labor. Of the total labor, 32.40% comprises domestic and migrant seasonal labor. Of the permanent migrant labor, 77.60% were Afghans and 22.40% were Syrians (Bozdemir et al., 2021).

Migrant labor working in the agricultural sector contributes significantly to the sustainability of production activities. Migrant labor is especially important in areas where the local labor does not want to work. However, the change in the perspective toward migrants and the fact that these people are not wanted by local people may cause social conflicts and changes in the economic and socio-cultural structure. The reasons for the emergence of xenophobia can be ethnocentrism, nativism, economic and political factors, generalizations and misinformation, negative experiences, negative characterizations and prejudices (Kökel & Odabaşı, 2017). Social impacts are manifested in different lifestyles as the cultures of two different societies influence each other, an increase in divorce rates and abuse of women and social tensions as polygamy becomes widespread in Turkish society (Düzakaya, 2016; Ercoşkun, 2015; Karasu, 2016; Aydın, 2019). In the report published by TISK on labor markets in 2020, 48% of the public in Türkiye described relations with Syrians as very nervous and 55% stated that they would not want their children to have a refugee friend. Misunderstandings about the resources allocated to Syrians in economic process and competitive conditions in the labor market also plays a role in this tension. Unemployment rates in Türkiye have been identified as one of the major problems of local people, including in provinces with large Syrian populations (TISK, 2020). Negative impacts on the economy include changes in the labor market, especially due to Syrian refugees, the problem of unregistered employment, competition with local tradesmen, damage to the wage compensation of the local labor, and an increase in house rents and prices of consumer goods in areas where refugees are concentrated (Assida, 2016; Döner, 2016; Ercoşkun, 2015; Gürcüoğlu, 2015; Karasu, 2016; Aydın, 2019). For Türkiye, these problems may lead to an increase in xenophobia.

Within the scope of this study, the xenophobia scale was used to determine the perspective of agricultural enterprises that carry out production activities in Konya province on migrant employment. Although employers did not find migrant labor sufficient regarding work discipline and sustainability of the business, they stated that local labor did not accept to do agricultural work for the same wages. For these reasons, there was compulsory cooperation between employers and migrant labor. The perspective toward migrant labor was revealed more

clearly with the xenophobia scale. This study aimed to contribute to the literature due to the limited number of studies measuring the effects of the concept on the agricultural sector (Landau et al., 2005; Palacios & Pedro, 2005; Hennebry & Hari, 2020) compared to studies examining the concept of xenophobia, which is frequently mentioned in terms of society (Stavenhagen & Salinas, 1994; Hopenhayn, 2001; Laura et al., 2019; Kaldık, 2021; Lopez & Gomez, 2021; Hiçdurmaz, 2023).

## Materials and Methods

Konya is among the provinces with high agricultural production potential in Türkiye. The province stands out regarding its high product diversity and agricultural employment diversity. It is estimated by institutions and organizations that more than 120,000 agricultural workers are employed in the livestock sector alone in Konya in Turkey. This study was conducted to determine the perspective toward the labor employed permanently and seasonally in various jobs. A stratified random sampling method was used to determine the number of enterprises to be surveyed; 5% error and 90% confidence limits were used. Yamane's formula (1967) was used to determine the layer distribution and the number of surveys. In line with the results obtained, 375 surveys were conducted in 2022. The surveys were obtained from face-to-face data. The surveys were grouped by taking into account agro-ecological regions, since climate factors directly affect the need for labor outside the enterprise (Table 1).

In surveys, a Likert scale was used to determine the attitudes and opinions of agricultural entrepreneurs toward migrant employment, and a one-dimensional scale was used. Canetti-Nisim & Pedahzur (2003) stated that xenophobic attitudes of individuals can be measured with a developed psychological scale. There are two psychological scales developed to measure xenophobia. One of them is the 5-item, 5-point Likert-type fear-based xenophobia scale developed by Van Der Veer et al. (2013). Although they developed their scale by focusing on the fear dimension of xenophobia, they also expressed the detestation and humiliation aspects of xenophobia. The other is a 6-item 6-point Likert-type xenophobia scale developed by Haque (2015) (Bozdağ & Kocatürk, 2017). A 5-point Likert scale was used to have a neutral answer option in case the participants did not want to answer extreme options due to their social, cultural, and political perspectives. The statements were expressed as "1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: undecided, 4: agree and 5:

strongly agree." Superior results were obtained in terms of validity in the 5-point Likert scale study where attitudes were evaluated (Adelson & McCoach, 2010; Özkan & Bindak, 2021). Within the scope of the study, a ready-made scale was used (Özmete et al. 2018; Gündüz, 2019; Öztürk, 2020), which was analyzed for validity and reliability, and these scales are suitable for 5-point Likert scale. Article approval was obtained in accordance with the ethics committee approval dated 23.02.2024 and numbered 708996.

## Research Findings

Within the scope of this study, 375 agricultural enterprises were interviewed and judgements about the scales, expressions that appropriate to the structure in the agricultural sector were used to determine the perspectives of migrants (Table 2). The level of agreement with the statements was ranked from highest to lowest and all of the evaluations analyzed the social and economic structure of the migrant labor. Agricultural entrepreneurs agreed with the opinion that the migrant and refugee population that constituted the migrant population presence in Türkiye was out of control by 88%. Accordingly, borders supported the entry of migrants/refugees into Türkiye. When the agricultural entrepreneurs who made up the local population were asked to make an assessment of the change in crime rates for the region, 81.80% stated that crime rates increased in the region. Operators were of the opinion that the labor supply created by the migrant labor due to their informal working conditions and their willingness to accept lower wages caused the local labor to be swept out of the agricultural sector. Although this view was supported by 78.20% of the operators, they also stated that they preferred migrant labor to reduce input costs. The view that migrants supplied cheap labor was also supported by 76.40%. Operators stated that in agricultural production processes, input costs increased over time and to maximize the profit obtained from the unit area, they tried to save on labor and this situation increased migrant employment. In addition to economic perspectives, the operators also stated that young people in the local population did not want to be employed in the agricultural sector due to the irregular working conditions in the agricultural sector, the lack of the concept of overtime and the limited social life areas in rural areas. Within this structure of both influencing and being influenced, the effectiveness of migrant n labor increased over time in agricultural labor markets.

Table 1. Agro-ecological Regions of Konya Province

Regions	Districts in the Region	Area (ha)	Ratio (%)	Annual Precipitation (mm)	Number of Surveys
1 <sup>st</sup> Region	Çumra, Karatay, Meram, Selçuklu	704.649	16,9	<400	77
2 <sup>nd</sup> Region	Akören, Ahırılı, Bozkır, Güneysınır, Hadim, Taşkent, Yalılıyüyük	525.234	12,6	>400	50
3 <sup>rd</sup> Region	Akşehir, Ereğli, Halkapınar, Ilgın, Tuzlukçu	597.982	14,3	>400	88
4 <sup>th</sup> Region	Beyşehir, Derbent, Derebucak, Doğanhisar, Hüyük, Seydişehir	589.385	14,2	<400	83
5 <sup>th</sup> Region	Altınekin, Cihanbeyli, Çeltik, Emirgazi, Kadınhanı, Karapınar, Kulu, Sarayönü, Yunak	1.752.150	42,0	<400	83
Total	31 Districts	4.169.400	100	-	

Source: Anonym, 2004; Çelik et al., 2015.

Table 1. Agricultural Operators' Perspectives on Migrant Labor

Judgment	Average	(%)
Migration/refugeeism in Türkiye is getting out of control.	4.40	88.00
Borders should be made more secure to prevent migrants/refugees from entering Türkiye.	4.30	86.00
Migrants/refugees cause an increase in crimes.	4.09	81.80
Migrants/refugees are taking jobs from people who live here.	3.91	78.20
I think that migrants/refugees constitute cheap labor.	3.82	76.40
I fear that my life will deteriorate with increasing migration.	3.81	76.20
I think that migrants/refugees cause cultural confusion in society.	3.71	74.20
I suspect that as migration increases, our own culture will be lost.	3.67	73.40
I am concerned that migrants/refugees may spread unusual diseases.	3.54	70.80
I think migrants/refugees are often rude and unsympathetic.	3.42	68.40
In case of war or political tension, I fear that migrants/refugees will remain loyal to their homeland.	3.29	65.80
Interacting with migrants/refugees makes me nervous.	3.23	64.60
It is good for migrants/refugees to stay close to their cultural roots.	2.78	55.60
I find interaction with migrants/refugees good.	2.36	47.20
I think that migrants/refugees contribute to my work.	2.29	45.80
I think migrants/refugees are committed to their work.	2.23	44.60
I enjoy interacting with migrants/refugees.	2.13	42.60
I think that migrants/refugees have sufficient technical knowledge of agricultural production.	1.94	38.80
I believe that migrants/refugees will support my country in times of crisis.	1.84	36.80
I think that migrants/refugees have better use of technology for agricultural production.	1.84	36.80

Although the employment of migrants became advantageous for businesses due to the aggravation of economic conditions, businesses became uneasy regarding social expectations, trust and welfare. Therefore, the rate of people who feared that increased migration would worsen their living conditions was 76.20%. Regarding social aspects, 74.30% of the operators agreed with the statement that migrants caused cultural confusion in society, while 73.40% of the operators doubted that our own culture would be lost. The concern about cultural degeneration was also felt in rural areas despite the low population density.

To make an assessment of the migrant labor employed by agricultural enterprises, judgments on business processes were also evaluated. As a result of these evaluations, it was determined that satisfaction with work had lower values than fears and concerns. Although the presence of migrant labor is important in terms of business continuity, there are deficiencies regarding efficient work and employer satisfaction. For agricultural operators, the contribution of migrant labor to the work and processes was 45.80%. Migrants' commitment to work was 44.60% and their level of technical knowledge was 38.80%. Lack of commitment to work was due to informal working conditions and wage provisions. The absence of a legal obligation for the work performance also negatively affected the work engagement process. Therefore, the attitudes and behaviors of the migrant labor and their level of technical knowledge negatively affected the employer's perspective. Although migrant labor was cheap, it was criticized by employers for its competencies and the way it performed the work. Agricultural operators also stated that they were willing to pay higher wages if the work was owned and performed as expected.

## Conclusion and Discussion

As a result of globalization, the mobility of people has increased; migration has increased due to many reasons such as economic conditions, political conflicts, and

education. People who move from one place to another because of migration need to participate in labor life in order to continue their vital activities. Therefore, migration and labor markets are closely related. To prevent the migration process from negatively affecting economic welfare, planned and directive policies are needed. However, it becomes difficult to manage this process successfully in sudden or mass migration. A quarter of the world's migrant workers work in agricultural production activities (IOM, 2020). Migrants are generally employed in agricultural production, which is seen as a low-paid, low-skilled job that the local labor force does not want to take part in (Dedeoğlu, 2016). Migrant labor is an important production factor as it contributes to sustaining production and reducing costs for agricultural operators. However, as a result of the unregistered employment of migrants in seasonal jobs and the supply of cheap labor to the market, the working and living conditions of the local labor force and individuals with work permits may be negatively affected (Bozdemir et al., 2019).

There are tangible and intangible barriers to the participation of migrant labor in the Turkish agricultural labor market. When the statements of agricultural operators are evaluated, it is seen that the barriers in the employment market are sometimes related to perceptions of migrants and sometimes real. None of the migrant labor employed in the agricultural sector has a work permit and they work informally with low wages. Working conditions are unfavorable for the motivation of the labor. In addition, since their skills and competencies and level of technology utilization are different in their home countries, there are problems of adaptation in the labor markets. To overcome the barriers for both employers and migrant labor, the lack of information should be completed, and misperceptions should be encouraged to change with public support. In the agricultural labor market, as in all other areas, it is envisaged that mutual harmony can only be achieved through changing perceptions; change and progress can be achieved.

Within the scope of this study, it is seen that the perspective toward the employment of migrant labor is significantly negative. The most important reason why employers perceive migrant labor as a threat is that they think that the migration/migration and refugee/asylum seeker situation in Türkiye cannot be managed (88.00%). This idea is supported by the idea that the borders should be more secure (86.00%). People perceive the presence of a migrant population as a threat to their own security and shape their perceptions in line with their observations. Observing the presence of migrant labor in criminal activities around them has led to an increase in xenophobia among employers. The fact that the migrant labor employed in the agricultural sector is unregistered prevents the implementation of sanctions for criminal acts and causes an uneasy environment in the social environment. Therefore, it is necessary to register, inspect and control the migrant workers working in agriculture with legal sanctions.

In the agricultural sector, it is possible to talk about topics that cause an increase in xenophobia on the part of employers and are evaluated as business success as a whole. The rate of employers who think that migrants/refugees are committed to their jobs is 44.60%. The situation that leads to a negative perspective on job attachment is again due to informal working conditions. The most important motivation of the migrant labor, which does not have any social security and is outside the legal processes, is money. Due to the low supply of local labor in the sector, the demand for migrant labor is higher. Therefore, the transfer of labor between enterprises with high wage offers is attractive for migrant labor despite the low wage gap. Workers need to be registered and supervised by both the employer and the employee during the employment process. Thus, it will be possible to contribute to the specialization of people for the job during their working period.

The presence of local labor should also be clearly evaluated and included in the adaptation process. Agricultural operators stated that the local labor generally does not want to stay in rural areas due to limited social life opportunities. Social spaces to be created in rural areas are one of the factors that will contribute to changing the perspective toward employment in the agricultural sector. In the agricultural sector, especially in areas where direct plant and animal production is carried out, operators do not have a professional title, working and working conditions. Therefore, legal arrangements to be made in this field will also contribute to changing the perspective on the agricultural sector and employment in this field.

The low level of technical knowledge of migrant labor is one of the crucial issues emphasized by agricultural operators. migrant labor is not viewed positively regarding security, social and cultural life. When the professional inadequacies of the people employed are added to these negativities, the perspective of the employers becomes more negative. However, migrant labor is important for the sustainability of agricultural production as the sector is in the second place in terms of employment by the local labor. Therefore, an increase in the level of knowledge about work can contribute to the solution of other problems. For this purpose, projects should be implemented to determine the structural characteristics, working areas and skills of

the labor. The continuity of the migrant labors' employment in the agricultural sector and their willingness to work in the agricultural sector should also be determined. Otherwise, the resources used by the projects will remain idle and their impact level will remain low. As a result of the determinations, training should be provided on relevant subjects and people should be specialized. In this process, it is also important to develop policies to solve the problem of informality to be able to plan for whom human capital resources are increased and which aspect of human resources are developed. The training that the migrant labor will benefit from, and their eventual specialization will contribute to reducing unproductive work that negatively affects the employers' perspective.

The fact that migrant labor is not prone to adaptation to working hours, targeted work, and monitoring targets are criticized by employers and lead to a decrease in the level of satisfaction. Low employer satisfaction also leads to an increase in xenophobia and conflict between employees and employers. Contributing to the reduction of this conflict will be possible through training and implementation activities. In short, ensuring adaptation and increasing qualifications for the employment of migrant labor in the agricultural sector will contribute to reducing xenophobia.

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