

What are the Individual Factors Determining Refugee Employment? A Case of the Sultanbeyli District

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Abstract

Refugees face significant barriers to accessing employment, including language barriers, work permit limitations, social tensions with host communities, and economic challenges. Therefore, identifying the factors influencing refugees' participation in the labor market is crucial for developing solution-oriented approaches. To identify the individual factors influencing refugee employment in socio-economically disadvantaged districts, this study examines Sultanbeyli as a case study. Key variables analyzed include Turkish language proficiency, vocational training, current employment status, vocation, gender, age, marital status, education level, disability, in-kind assistance, cash assistance, household size, and household income. Employing binary logistic regression, the findings highlight that Turkish language proficiency is a critical determinant of employment, emphasizing the importance of linguistic integration for refugees. Additionally, being currently employed, having vocational training, and being younger were positively associated with employment likelihood. In contrast, receiving in-kind assistance and possessing higher levels of education were linked to lower employment rates, reflecting potential mismatches between refugee qualifications and the demands of the local labor market. These results align with the previous studies while revealing region-specific employment dynamics shaped by language barriers and economic conditions in Sultanbeyli. The study highlighted the necessity of targeted interventions, such as vocational language programs and tailored workforce development initiatives, to enhance refugee inclusion and integration into the labor market.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Türkiye has been hosting over 3.1 million Syrian refugees³ since the Syrian Civil War began in 2011, providing essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment through the Temporary Protection Regulation. Initially, many refugees were placed in border camps, but as the population grew and the need for more private living spaces emerged, refugees gradually integrated into cities across the country. While numerous cities have hosted refugees, Istanbul has become a primary destination due to its economic opportunities and social networks. Early humanitarian efforts primarily focused on meeting basic needs through in-kind and cash assistance programs. However, after 13 years, these programs are no longer sufficient, and the majority of refugees now need sustainable livelihood opportunities to survive. According to *Syrians Barometer* published by (Erdoğan, 2021: 270), 77,8% of Syrian refugees do not intend to return to Syria, a percentage that continues to increase each year, further emphasizing the importance of integrating Syrian refugees into the labor market.

Despite this need, significant barriers hinder Syrian refugees from accessing livelihoods. These include work permit costs, cultural norms, social tensions between host and refugee communities, and language barriers. These challenges are particularly acute in socio-economically disadvantaged districts like Sultanbeyli, which serves as a critical example of the compound difficulties faced by Syrian refugees in such settings. Sultanbeyli is unique due to its history as a hub for internal migration, with 97% of its population consisting of migrants (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2022). This influx of internal migrants and Syrian refugees has created a distinct socio-economic dynamic, described as “poverty in turn⁴”, where disadvantaged groups repeatedly reshape the district’s demographic and economic landscape (Işık, & Pınarcıoğlu, 2001). These overlapping migration patterns have intensified the struggle to access sustainable livelihoods, further intertwining these challenges with broader economic and social pressures.

3 Although the term “refugee” is geographically limited in its formal definition in Türkiye, it will be used here as an umbrella concept. This is because, while Syrians in Türkiye are legally under temporary protection status, they fled Syria due to the risk of persecution, aligning with the broader understanding of refugeehood.

4 “Poverty in turn” describes how urban poor develop survival strategies that rely on passing their poverty onto others. In this cycle, the poor can improve their living standards and escape poverty when they find a group to take their place. In Sultanbeyli, this cycle continues as people who achieve better living conditions often move to other districts. Migration plays a key role in this process, with Syrian refugees becoming the new group that takes on the burden of poverty.

Recognizing these complexities, the Sultanbeyli Municipality supported the establishment of the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Assistance and Solidarity Association (RASAS) - Mülteciler ve Sığınmacılar Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği in 2014 to address the specific needs of refugees. RASAS provides a range of services, including livelihood support, mental health care, education, and protection, primarily in Sultanbeyli and neighboring Umraniye. Through its SUKOM data system, RASAS tracks individual cases, identifies needs, and implements targeted interventions, offering valuable insights into the challenges Syrian refugees face in achieving economic stability.

According to RASAS's 2023 Activity Report, 1,130 Syrian refugees applied to its RASAS Career Center, but only 270 secured employments (RASAS, 2024: 32), highlighting the significant difficulties Syrian refugees face in accessing livelihoods in Sultanbeyli. This study seeks to uncover the underlying reasons behind these low employment rates by examining the influence of individual factors on Syrian refugees' employment outcomes. That is particularly significant as it focuses on a socio-economically disadvantaged district and utilizes first-hand data provided by an implementing organization. While existing research often addresses refugee employment at a macro level, there is a lack of studies that explore how individual characteristics interact with socio-economic conditions in disadvantaged urban areas. By bridging this gap, this study offers a more understanding of the barriers and facilitators of employment for refugees, providing evidence-based insights that can inform targeted policy interventions and support programs.

To achieve this aim, the study is structured into three parts. The first part involves a literature review to explore similar studies globally and identify patterns and differences. The second part details the methodology, outlining the most effective approach to measure the influence of individual factors. The final part presents a discussion of findings on how these factors shape employment outcomes, offering insights that can inform future policy and practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many refugees face multiple barriers that affect their employment status. Even when they have the legal right to work, their employment outcomes often lag behind those of other individuals. Refugees experience disadvantages not only in comparison to members of the host community but also relative to other migrant groups, a phenomenon Connor (2010) refers to as the "refugee gap." This gap highlights the economic disparities

faced by refugees, who are more likely to be employed in lower-skilled occupations and earn significantly less than their peers. Contributing factors include limited language proficiency, lower levels of education, restricted social support, and poorer mental and physical health, which are often exacerbated by living in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

These challenges align with the findings of Lee et al., who, in their comprehensive literature review, identify institutional, organizational, and individual factors as critical determinants of refugee employment. At the institutional level, they discuss both formal and informal components, including the influence of institutional regulations, institutional arrangements, and the broader socio-political climate. Organizational factors involve the role of employers and organizations that support refugees in resettlement efforts. On an individual level, factors such as demographics (e.g., gender and age), language proficiency, social networks, psychological responses, and motivation also play a significant role. Importantly, they emphasize “...it is the *interplay of these various factors that cumulatively contributes to suboptimal employment outcomes*” (Lee et al., 2020: 13).

Although institutional and organizational factors play significant roles, this study focuses specifically on individual-level factors influencing refugee employment. To this end, a targeted literature review was conducted, prioritizing studies that analyze multiple individual-level factors together, rather than isolating the impact of each factor separately. Thus, this literature review aims to identify which individual factors are determinants of refugee employment. Table 2.1 provides a description of the study characteristics and their corresponding outcomes, offering an overview of the existing study in this domain.

Table 2.1: Description of study characteristics and outcomes

Author, & Year	Study Method	Sample	Summary of Findings
Potocky-Tripodi (2001)	Quantitative Survey	4,241 East European, 4,748 Southeast Asian, and 4,707 Cuban refugees in the U.S.	Employment determinants included gender, education, and disability status. English proficiency and U.S. citizenship increased employment chances, while community-level factors showed no significant effect.
Kanas, & van Tubergen (2009)	Quantitative Survey	Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean immigrants in the Netherlands	Host-country education yields higher returns on occupational status than origin-country education. Work experience in the host country improves both employment and occupational status. Returns to origin-country schooling vary by immigrant group, being higher for former colonies.
Yu et al. (2012)	Quantitative Survey	289 North Korean female refugees in South Korea	Young children reduce employment likelihood. Personal contacts are effective for job search. Vocational training may negatively impact employment. Government/private transfers lower employment rates.
Lundborg (2013)	Quantitative Survey	Blue collar workers in private sector in Sweden 4,881,955 individuals of which 162,110 are refugee	Refugees' unemployment duration exceeds that of natives, especially for culturally distant groups (e.g., Iran, Iraq, and Horn of Africa). Unemployment days decrease over time but remain higher than natives', particularly for older arrivals. Business cycle upturns benefit natives more than refugees.
Renner, & Senft (2013)	Quantitative Survey questionnaire	83 refugees in Austria	Participation in training courses and prior work experience in Austria predicted employment. Longer residence duration correlated negatively with employment, emphasizing the need for early vocational integration.
UNHCR & World Bank (2016)	Mixed methods	Refugees in Uganda across rural and urban sites	Barriers included language, legal challenges, and discrimination. Factors like education and host community support improved labor market participation.
Betts et al. (2017)	Quantitative Survey questionnaire	Syrian refugees in Austria, the Netherlands, and the UK	Gender, physical health, and social networks positively influence employment. Host-country language proficiency and higher education may not directly increase employment likelihood.
Khawaja, & Hebbani (2018)	Quantitative Survey	Former refugees from Ethiopia, Burma, and DRC resettled in Australia	Gender, education, English proficiency, and length of stay influence employment. Moderate education increases employment opportunities compared to high or low levels.

Kayaoglu, & Erdoğan (2019)	Quantitative Survey questionnaire	1,235 Syrian refugees in Türkiye	Employment is influenced by age, gender, education, Turkish proficiency, and income before migration. Women face higher inactivity rates. Self-settled refugees have lower unemployment, but higher inactivity compared to camp residents.
Knappert et al. (2020)	Qualitative interviews	18 refugees from Armenia, Eritrea, Senegal, and Syria in the Netherlands	Host-country language proficiency, social capital, and volunteer work facilitate inclusion. Corporate social responsibility and sympathetic media coverage also play roles.
Kosyakava et al. (2022)	Quantitative Survey	Refugees in Germany	Employment increases with stay length, more for men than women. The gender gap narrows over time but remains significant.
Senthanar et al. (2023)	Literature review	Refugees in Canada (1993–2018 studies)	Refugees struggle to find jobs matching prior skills. Highly educated refugees face limited career opportunities and dissatisfaction with job prospects.
Yükseker et al. (2023)	Qualitative interviews	Syrian refugees in Türkiye	Social, cultural, and material capital positively influences employment. Language skills (Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish) and year of arrival affect labor market participation. Social capital from Syria aids employment integration.
Lee, & Jung (2024)	Quantitative Survey	Refugees in the United States	Both pre- and post-migration factors influence employment. Vocational training and English proficiency are critical, while social assistance shows no positive relationship with employment.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to determine individual factors influencing refugee employment using a quantitative data analysis method. To analyze these factors, employment status was defined as the dependent variable, while various personal factors, such as education level, age, and vocational characteristics, were examined as dependent variables to understand their association with employment. Logistic regression was selected to analyze the data and identify factors. This method was chosen as it is particularly effective for analyzing relationships where the outcome variable is categorical or binary. That will allow for examining the impact of multiple explanatory variables on a binary outcome, making it ideal for this study.

The dataset, initially comprising 1,492 entries and provided by RASAS, was cleaned to address missing values, people who are residing in different districts, and non-Syrians. After this process, the data was reduced to a final sample of 591 entries, which were then analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistic 22. The data were coded based on the primary hypothesis that individual factors influence employment status. According to this hypothesis, thirteen different

variables were analyzed to examine the impact of each on employment outcomes. The thirteen independent variables included individual factors such as gender, age, marital status, education level, disability, current employment status, in-kind assistance, cash assistance, Turkish language proficiency, vocation, soft skills and vocational training, household size, and household income. Firstly, the data were analyzed descriptively using frequency analysis. Subsequently, all variables were tested through binary logistic regression, with each variable individually assessed as a dependent variable to examine its specific effect on employment status.

4. RESULTS

To provide an initial understanding of the refugee population seeking employment in Sultanbeyli, a descriptive analysis was conducted, highlighting key demographic characteristics presented in Table 4.1. This table offers a comprehensive overview of the demographic profile of these individuals, without distinguishing between those who are employed and those who are not. The data reveals key insights into the demographic composition of this group. The majority are male, and most graduated from a primary school or below, with smaller portions reaching middle school, high school, and undergraduate or postgraduate levels. Disability status indicates that a large majority of these refugees are not with disability. Additionally, more than half of the refugees do not speak Turkish, while a notable minority are proficient in the language. The data on soft skills and vocational training shows that the vast majority have not attended any training programs. In terms of household size, most refugees live in households with 5-10 people, and the majority fall within the lowest income.

Table 4.1: Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Employment Characteristics of the Refugee

Age				Frequency		Ratio		
	15-29			258		43.0%		
	30 - 54			305		51.60%		
	55 +			28		4.70%		
Education		Frequency	Ratio	Vocation		Frequency	Ratio	
	Primary School and Below	304	51.40%		White Collar	38	6.40%	
	Middle School	125	21.20%		Blue Collar	257	43.50%	
	High School	106	17.90%		Unqualified	234	39.60%	
	Undergraduate and Postgraduate	56	9.50%		Other	62	10.50%	
Gender		Frequency	Ratio	Marital Status		Frequency	Ratio	
	Women	133	22.50%		Single	260	44%	
	Men	458	77.50%		Married	331	56%	
Household Size		Frequency	Ratio	Household Income		Frequency	Ratio	
	0-4 people	262	44.30%		0 - 17.002 TRY	389	65.80%	
	5-10 people	315	53.30%		17.003 - 30.000 TRY	178	30.10%	
	11 + people	14	2.40%		30.000 TRY +	24	4.10%	
		Frequency	Ratio			Frequency	Ratio	
Disability	Not with Disability	528	89.30%	Turkish Proficiency	Does Not Speak Turkish	324	54.80%	
	With Disability	63	10.70%		Speak Turkish	267	45.20%	
Current Employment Status		Frequency	Ratio	Attending Trainings		Frequency	Ratio	
	Not Employed	299	50.60%		Not Attended	559	94.60%	
	Employed	292	49.40%		Attended	32	5.40%	
	In-kind Assistance		Frequency	Ratio	Cash Assistance		Frequency	Ratio
		Not Receive	404	68.40%		Not Receive	178	30.10%
	Receive	187	31.60%		Receive	413	69.90%	

Out of a total of 591 refugees, only 225 (38.1%) were employed by various employers, with placements based on their vocational backgrounds. Among the employed, only 22.7% were women, and a significant majority (84.4%) were employed in unskilled positions, primarily in blue-collar jobs. For those who remained unemployed, some were referred to work but were subsequently rejected, while others were not referred to at all. The primary reasons for rejection by firms were language barriers (36%), lack

of vocational skills (14.7%), and issues with registration and identification (13%). Additionally, a substantial number of refugees were not referred to employers primarily because they declined job offers. Among these, 63.7% cited that the wages offered by the sectors were below their expectations, and 10.6% declined referrals due to disabilities that limited their work options.

In addition to the descriptive analysis, Binary Logistic Regression was performed using SPSS to examine the impact of individual factors on Syrian refugees' employment in Türkiye. The analysis includes the Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients, Model Summary, and Variables in the Equation tables for a comprehensive evaluation.

Table 4.2: Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
Step	37.526	17	0.003
Block	37.526	17	0.003
Model	37.526	17	0.003

The Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients table assesses the overall significance of the logistic regression model, examining whether the independent variables collectively have a meaningful effect on the dependent variable. The Chi-square value of 37.526, with 17 degrees of freedom, indicates the extent of variance explained by the model. The significance level ($p = 0.003$) is below the threshold of 0.05 (Demir, 2020: 430) confirming that the model is statistically significant. This shows that the independent variables, taken together, significantly contribute to explaining the outcome variable, validating the model's relevance for the data.

Table 4.3: Model Summary

-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
747.808 ^a	0.062	0.084
a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than 0.001.		

The model summary provides important insights into the logistic regression model's fit. The -2 Log Likelihood value, which reflects the model's goodness of fit, suggests that the model captures relevant relationships in the data. Lower values generally imply better fit, though this measure is typically not as informative in logistic regression. The Cox & Snell R-Square and Nagelkerke R-Square values offer pseudo-R-squared statistics, explaining approximately 6.2% and 8.4% of the variance in the dependent variable, respectively. Although these values are modest compared

to linear regression, logistic models often exhibit lower R-squared values due to their binary nature and normal (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000: 167). It will be used to determine the model. This limitation is also typical in social science data, where the complex influences on human behavior yield lower explanatory power. Nonetheless, these values provide valuable insight into the contribution of independent variables and are useful in model comparison and evaluation stages.

Table 4.4: Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Gender	-0.166	0.253	0.434	1	0.510	0.847	0.516	1,389
Marital Status	-0.019	0.224	0.007	1	0.934	0.982	0.633	1,523
Education - Elementary and Below			5.706	3	0.127			
Education - Middle School	0.388	0.225	2.963	1	0.085	1.474	0.948	2.292
Education - High School	0.230	0.254	0.820	1	0.365	1.258	0.765	2.068
Education - Undergraduate and Above	-0.394	0.383	1.060	1	0.303	0.674	0.318	1.428
Disability	-0.011	0.304	0.001	1	0.970	0.989	0.544	1.795
Current Working Status	0.409	0.213	3.680	1	0.055	1.506	0.991	2.288
Cash Assistance	-0.131	0.207	0.398	1	0.528	0.878	0.585	1.316
In-kind Assistance	-0.367	0.215	2.923	1	0.087	0.693	0.455	1.055
Language Proficiency	0.557	0.190	8.624	1	0.003	1.745	1.203	2.530
Soft Skills and Vocational Training	0.746	0.384	3.770	1	0.052	2.109	0.993	4.479
Age	0.021	0.011	3.714	1	0.054	1.021	1.000	1.043
Household Size	-0.045	0.040	1.263	1	0.261	0.956	0.885	1.034
Household Income	0.000	0.000	0.023	1	0.880	1.000	1.000	1.000
Vocation - Unqualified			1.250	3	0.741			
Vocation – Blue Collar	0.102	0.212	0.233	1	0.629	1.108	0.731	1.678
Vocation – White Collar	0.378	0.424	0.794	1	0.373	1.459	0.636	3.348
Vocation – No Vocation	-0.128	0.376	0.116	1	0.734	0.880	0.421	1.840
Constant	-1.214	0.509	5,680	1	0.017	0.297		

Table 4.4 provides coefficients for both constant and independent variables, along with their standard errors, Wald test statistics, significance levels (Sig.), odds ratios (Exp(B)), and confidence intervals for the odds ratios. It offers insights into the contribution and importance of each independent variable to the model. Variables with a Sig. value greater than 0.05 are considered statistically insignificant, while those with a Sig. value less than 0.05 are deemed significant (Demir, 2020: 432-433). According to Field (2013), the odds ratio, represented as Exp(B), provides a measure

of how changes in a predictor influence the likelihood of an outcome. Values greater than 1 indicate increased odds of the outcome as the predictor rises, while values less than 1 suggest decreased odds. For reliable interpretation, the confidence interval of $\text{Exp}(B)$ should not include 1. In this table, Language Proficiency is statistically significant ($p = 0.003$) with an $\text{Exp}(B)$ of 1.745, indicating that individuals proficient in Turkish are significantly more likely to be employed. Variables close to the threshold for significance include Current Working Status ($p = 0.055$), In-kind Assistance ($p = 0.087$), Workforce Training ($p = 0.052$), and Age ($p = 0.054$). These variables suggest possible, but not definitive, associations with employment outcomes. Conversely, Gender ($p = 0.510$), Marriage Status ($p = 0.934$), Education Level (generally above 0.05)- (While Middle School education shows a slight positive association with employment, it does not meet the criteria for statistical significance. However, the p-value being near 0.05 suggests that it might still play a minor role in influencing employment outcomes.), Disability Status ($p = 0.970$), Household Size ($p = 0.261$), Household Income ($p = 0.880$), and Vocation ($p = 0.741$) do not exhibit any statistically significant impact on employment in this model.

5. DISCUSSION

Among the findings, Turkish language proficiency emerges as the most significant factor affecting refugee employment. In other words, fluency in Turkish increases refugees' likelihood of finding employment. This aligns with previous studies in the literature (Potocky-Tripodi, 2001; Khawaja, & Hebbani, 2018; Kayaoğlu, & Erdoğan, 2019; Knappert et al., 2020) and is further supported by Sultanbeyli Municipality's *İş Piyasası İhtiyaç Analizi Araştırma Raporu*. According to the report, one of the primary reasons employers cite for not hiring refugees is the language barrier (Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2021: 24). However, this finding differs from Yüksek et al. (2023), who reported knowing additional languages, such as Arabic and Kurdish, serves as a competitive advantage for refugees in Gaziantep and other cities. This discrepancy may be attributed to regional differences. Sultanbeyli is characterized by low socio-economic development and limited second-language proficiency. The majority of workplaces in Sultanbeyli are concentrated in fast consumption, construction, and textile sectors, and small and medium-sized enterprises dominating the local economy (Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2021a: 24-25). Consequently, refugees lacking Turkish language skills face disadvantages in the labor market, while proficiency in other languages generally does not offer a competitive advantage.

Current employment status is another significant determinant of employment likelihood. Refugees who are already employed have a higher probability of finding an employment opportunity. This finding aligns with previous studies (Kanas, & van Tubergen, 2009; Renner and Senft, 2013) and can be attributed to several factors. First, social networks play a crucial role in finding new employment opportunities, as highlighted in previous studies (Yu et al., 2012; Knappert et al., 2020, Yüксеker et al., 2023) and employment expands access to these networks, which can facilitate the search for subsequent job opportunities. Second, prior work experience reduces training costs for employers, making experienced candidates more attractive. Third, employment status may address employer's concerns about refugees' adaptation into the workplace. Sultanbeyli Municipality's report (2021a) also highlights that some employers' express doubts about refugees' work ethic and adaptation to local workplace culture.

Participation in soft skills and vocational training is another critical factor that enhances refugees' employment likelihood. This finding diverges from Yu et al. (2012), who argue that such programs may inadvertently hinder employment by increasing the reservation wages of job seekers or creating a mismatch between the skills acquired through training and the demands of available jobs (Yu et al., 2012: 120). In contrast, it aligns with Renner and Senft's (2013) study, which underscores the dual advantages of these programs: not only do they provide participants with practical skills tailored to labor market needs, but they also serve as a signal of the participants' motivation and readiness to join the workforce (Renner and Senft, 2013: 268). Additionally, vocational training may enhance participants' confidence and expand their professional networks, further boosting employability. This finding also highlights the importance of vocational training, recommending the expansion of initiatives like the Ministry of National Education's Vocational Training for Employment Program. Encouraging participation in vocational high schools and sector-specific training programs could address the identified gaps. However, while soft skills and vocational training are determinants of employment, refugees' current vocations in Sultanbeyli do not appear to influence their employment outcomes significantly, indicating labor market demands in the district.

Formal education is not identified as a primary determinant of employment in this study. While education did not emerge as a significant determinant of employment at the aggregate level, a closer examination of subcategories reveals an inverse relationship between education levels and employment rates. Refugees with lower education levels demonstrated higher employment rates. This finding diverges from studies such as Potocky-Tripodi

(2001), Lundborg (2013), UNHCR, and Wold Bank (2016). However, it aligns with studies such as Senthana et al. (2023) and Betts et al. (2017). While Senthana et al. emphasize the broader challenges faced by refugees in securing employment, Betts et al. specifically analyzed the employment outcomes of Syrian refugees in Austria, the Netherlands, and the UK, highlighting barriers such as skill mismatches, certification requirements, and language proficiency demands in competitive industries (Senthana et al., 2023: 22). In Sultanbeyli, the local economic structure further accentuates this dynamic. The dominant industries, such as construction and textiles, create jobs that do not demand higher education. Employers in these sectors tend to prioritize practical skills over academic qualifications. Consequently, refugees with higher education may perceive these roles as misaligned with their aspirations, while employers may view overqualified candidates as less suitable. Supporting this perspective, Kocakaya et al. (2023) found that labor market-related factors, such as job requirements, working conditions, and sectoral dynamics, often play a more significant role in employment outcomes than individual characteristics in Sultanbeyli.

The study also explored the impact of social assistance on refugee employment. While no significant relationship was found between cash assistance and employment, contrasting with the findings of Yu et al. (2012), and Lee and Jung (2024), in-kind assistance was associated with a reduced employment likelihood. This may reflect a reciprocal dynamic: individuals may be less likely to find employment because they are receiving in-kind assistance, but at the same time, they may be receiving in-kind assistance due to difficulties in finding a job. Additionally, the provision of in-kind assistance by Sultanbeyli Municipality and RASAS could make these forms of support more accessible than cash assistance. Refugees receiving cash assistance might also opt for informal employment to retain eligibility, obscuring the relationship between cash assistance and formal employment (Mülteciler Derneği, 2024).

Age also influences refugee employment outcomes, with younger refugees being more likely to find a job, aligning with the findings of Kayaoğlu and Erdoğan (2023). Several factors contribute to this relationship. First, the nature of the local labor market plays a critical role. Most job opportunities for refugees in Sultanbeyli are in physically demanding, low-skilled sectors such as construction, textiles, and manufacturing. These jobs often require stamina and physical labor, making them more accessible to younger individuals. Second, cultural dynamics among refugee populations may contribute to this relationship. Many refugees in Sultanbeyli come from rural areas in Syria, such as Aleppo, where traditional family structures often

place greater responsibility on younger family members to provide financial support. As a result, older refugees may be less likely to seek employment actively, instead relying on younger household members for income. Finally, younger refugees tend to adapt more quickly to new environments. They are generally more proficient at learning the Turkish language and navigating cultural differences, giving them a competitive advantage in the local labor market.

In contrast to findings in previous studies (Lundborg, 2013; Kosyakova et al., 2022; Kayaoğlu & Erdoğan, 2023), gender did not emerge as a significant factor influencing refugee employment in Sultanbeyli. This result may reflect the unique cultural and social context of the district. Similarly, marital status, household size, and household income were also found to have no significant effect on employment outcomes, challenging traditional assumptions about the interplay between family dynamics and economic participation among refugees. The lack of a clear gendered divide in employment could be attributed to the overlapping challenges faced by both male and female refugees in accessing the labor market. However, for women, these challenges are often compounded by cultural expectations and caregiving responsibilities, which traditionally limit their workforce participation. Larger households, too, present a complex dynamic where caregiving and income-generation roles are fluid, making it difficult to establish direct correlations between household size, income levels, and employment outcomes. This nuanced reality may also be shaped by specific local initiatives, such as the Sultanbeyli Municipality's Hemdem Women's Cooperative, which might mitigate gender disparities. These findings may suggest that replicating such models in other low socio-economic districts could reduce the gender effect on employment outcomes.

Finally, disability status does not affect employment outcomes, contrasting with the findings of Betts et al. (2017). This is likely because refugees with disabilities often do not actively seek work, potentially due to a lack of hope for employment opportunities. The disabilities of those seeking employment are often related to chronic illnesses or "invisible" conditions, which may not limit their ability to engage in the labor market. These factors likely explain the lack of a significant relationship between disability status and employment in this context.

6. CONCLUSION

Employment has become a critical issue, especially after 13 years of Syrian refugees' presence in Türkiye. This study focused on understanding

the influence of individual factors on refugee employment. Using data directly obtained from the RASAS Career Center, the study employed binary logistic regression to analyze these factors, making it a significant example of a district-specific study based on primary data. While the study has relatively low explanatory power and limited generalizability, it provides valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities within the Sultanbeyli context. The study provides important insights for the Sultanbeyli cases. The study results highlighted the importance of Turkish proficiency, vocational and soft skills training, current employment, age, and in-kind assistance.

The findings reveal that Turkish language proficiency remains a significant barrier, with many refugees still lacking the skills necessary for employment. This shows the urgent need for targeted Turkish language training, particularly vocational language programs and speaking clubs. Interestingly, education showed no direct relationship with employment, except for middle school graduation, which has a slightly positive relation with employability. This outcome aligns with Sultanbeyli's labor market, which primarily demands unskilled, blue-collar workers. Additionally, employers may avoid hiring individuals with higher education due to perceived higher costs, suggesting the importance of designing vocational and soft skills training aligned with sectoral needs.

Being currently employed was positively associated with finding a job, highlighting the importance of sectoral engagement initiatives, such as job placement programs and on-the-job training. Conversely, in-kind assistance was negatively associated with employment, suggesting the need to restructure such support. Therefore, it is suggested that linking in-kind assistance to active job-seeking behaviors or vocational training participation could help shift assistance toward promoting employment readiness and self-sufficiency.

The study also emphasized the significant impact of sectoral conditions on employment. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could play a crucial role in advocating for better job opportunities, government incentives, and policies to improve sectoral conditions while supporting refugees in accessing decent work opportunities.

Despite existing programs by governmental bodies, local authorities, and NGOs, the study raises concerns about their limited impact on increasing employment. This may result from a lack of alignment with specific sectoral needs or an insufficient understanding of refugee contexts. Additionally, weak coordination among organizations could prevent these activities from achieving their objectives.

This study provided critical insights into individual factors influencing employment in low socio-economic districts using first-hand data. Future studies can focus on evaluating the implementation of employment-related programs to understand why they fail to achieve their intended outcomes and explore how better sectoral alignment, and inter-organizational collaboration can enhance their effectiveness.

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