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ALTINBAŞ UNIVERSITY

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Politics and International Relations

**UNDERSTANDING THE CONSEQUENCES OF
THE INFORMAL LABOR MARKET ON THE
LIVES OF SYRIAN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN
İSTANBUL**

Sewar BARAKAT

Master's Thesis

Supervisor

Asst.Prof. Dr. Eylem AKDENİZ GÖKER

İstanbul, 2024

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Sewar BARAKAT

Signature

XXXXXXXXXX

DEDICATION

Firstly, I dedicate this thesis to all the children worldwide who have been compelled into child labor, with the hope that they may have a better life and brighter future opportunities.

I express my profound gratitude to God for providing me with the strength and patience to successfully complete this journey. I am deeply thankful to my father, Prof. Samer Barakat, He played the role of the primary moral supporter, and provided me with many of his academic experiences to help me overcome the difficulties of this journey. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my mother Solaf, whose prayers have accompanied me at every step, and to my siblings, Sameera, Sabeen, and Sama, for their constant positive encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

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During the Syrian war, millions of refugees, including over 1.8 million children, fled to Türkiye in search of safety. Now, they face challenges as they try to rebuild their lives. Istanbul, as a major urban center, has the highest concentration of Syrian refugees, and consequently, many children in Istanbul face limitations on where they can live and work, making it difficult for them to secure formal education and employment. This often results in poverty and exploitation, with children having to work to support their families' survival. The essential aim of this study is to explore the experiences of Syrian children engaged in child labor in Türkiye, focusing on the factors leading to their involvement, the working conditions they face, and the impact on their well-being. To accomplish this goal, empirical data was gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted in Istanbul with eight Syrian children (four boys and four girls). The study contends that because of early labor ages, restricted educational opportunities, long work hours, and a history of psychological distress linked to their experiences during the war before arriving in Turkey, Syrian children involved in child labor are particularly vulnerable to severe exploitation. Regretfully, they are now under even more strain due to child labor.

Key Words: Syrian, Child Labor, İstanbul, War, Refugee.

ÖZET

KAYIT DIŐI İŐGÜCÜ PİYASASININ İSTANBUL'DAKİ SURİYELİ MÜLTECİ ÇOCUKLARIN HAYATLARI ÜZERİNDEKİ SONUÇLARINI ANLAMAK

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Suriye savaşı sırasında 1,8 milyonu çocuk olmak üzere milyonlarca mülteci güvenlik arayışıyla Türkiye'ye kaçtı. Şimdi hayatlarını yeniden inşa etmeye çalışırken zorluklarla karşılaşılıyorlar. Büyük bir kent merkezi olarak İstanbul, Suriyeli mültecilerin en yoğun olduğu yer ve bunun sonucunda da İstanbul'daki pek çok çocuk, yaşayabilecekleri ve çalışabilecekleri yerler konusunda kısıtlamalarla karşı karşıya kalıyor ve bu da örgün eğitim ve istihdam sağlamalarını zorlaştırıyor. Bu durum çoğunlukla yoksulluk ve sömürüyle sonuçlanmakta, çocuklar ailelerinin hayatta kalmasını sağlamak için çalışmak zorunda kalmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Türkiye'de çocuk işçiliğine maruz kalan Suriyeli çocukların deneyimlerini araştırmak, bu çocukların katılımına yol açan faktörlere, karşılaştıkları çalışma koşullarına ve bunların refahları üzerindeki etkisine odaklanmaktır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için İstanbul'da sekiz Suriyeli çocukla (dört erkek ve dört kız) gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış nitel görüşmeler yoluyla ampirik veriler toplanmıştır. Çalışma, erken çalışma yaşları, sınırlı eğitim fırsatları, uzun çalışma saatleri ve Türkiye'ye gelmeden önce savaş sırasında yaşadıkları deneyimlerden kaynaklanan psikolojik sıkıntı geçmişi nedeniyle çocuk işçiliğine maruz kalan Suriyeli çocukların ağır sömürüye karşı özellikle savunmasız olduğunu ileri sürüyor. Maalesef çocuk işçiliği nedeniyle artık daha da fazla baskı altındalar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriye, Çocuk İşçiliği, İstanbul, Savaş, Mülteci.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Syrian civil war, a multifaceted and devastating conflict, has had a significant impact on Syria and its neighbors. Beginning as a peaceful protest in 2011, the situation quickly escalated into a full-fledged war. Since the outbreak of hostilities, the conflict has claimed the lives of over 470,000 people, injured over 1 million others, and forced millions to flee their homes, resulting in a massive humanitarian crisis. The war involves many nations, rebel factions, and terrorist organizations, complicating matters even more (Marks, 2023).

Syria's protracted conflict continues to impose severe hardships, with more than 16.7 million Syrians requiring humanitarian assistance, accounting for seventy percentage of the country's population. Most refugees, roughly 92 percent, live in cities and rural areas rather than designated refugee camps. However, this does not guarantee stability, as more than seventy percentage of Syrian refugees live in poverty. They face significant challenges, including limited access to essential services, education, and employment opportunities, and have little chance of returning to their home country (UNHCR, Syria Refugee Crisis Explained, 2024).

According to the United Nations' 2023 Global Appeal, over 6.9 million people are internally displaced in Syria, with more than 5.4 million seeking refuge in other countries. A significant number of these refugees have sought refuge in Jordan and Lebanon, putting additional strain on the countries' already limited infrastructure and resources. Türkiye has hosted over 3.4 million Syrian refugees, with some attempting to seek asylum in Europe (Action, 2024). Children and teenagers make up nearly half of the Syrian refugee population. These young people have suffered significant trauma because of the conflict and continue to face ongoing challenges, such as a lack of essential resources, unstable housing, and limited educational options (Popham, et al., 2023).

Globally, the 3RP was established in 2022 as a comprehensive framework for coordinating, planning, advocating, fundraising, and implementing responses to the Syrian crisis, which included both humanitarian and development partners. It consists of a unified regional strategy and separate country chapters for Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. The 3RP consists of two interconnected components: the refugee section, which focuses on refugees' protection and humanitarian needs, and the resilience segment, which aims to

improve the resilience, stabilization, and development needs of affected individuals, communities, and institutions. The primary goal is to build the capacity of national stakeholders involved in the response (Al Dardari & Gharaibeh, 2022).

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Türkiye has become the host country for the world's largest population of Syrian refugees. Syrians have been permitted to enter Türkiye under the "Open Door" policy since April 29, 2011, and have not been repatriated. Furthermore, they have received "temporary protected status" (Uygur , 2020). Migrants prefer Türkiye because of its internal and international stability, peace, political trust, open-door policy, and dedication to helping those in need (Bilen, Gür, Koç, & Karahan, 2020).

Several Turkish cities, including Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay, have a significant population of Syrian refugees. These areas, particularly those near the Syrian border, have seen significant demographic changes and face increased demand for local resources and services. A sizable portion of the refugee population works in the informal sector, often under difficult conditions. Despite these obstacles, the Turkish government and other organizations are actively working to improve access to education, healthcare, and social services. These efforts aim to facilitate refugee integration and promote peaceful coexistence with local communities (İçduygu & Diker, 2017).

For example, Gaziantep, a prominent city in southeastern Turkey, has experienced significant impacts due to the influx of Syrian refugees following the onset of the Syrian civil war. The substantial refugee population has led to discernible social and economic transformations within the city. With hundreds of thousands of Syrians residing in Gaziantep, it ranks among the Turkish cities hosting the largest refugee communities (Avşaroğlu , 2021). The arrival of Syrian refugees has produced both advantageous and challenging economic effects. Refugees have stimulated economic growth through the establishment of businesses and an increase in consumer demand. Conversely, their presence has also exerted additional pressure on public services and infrastructure. From a social perspective, ongoing efforts are being made to integrate the Syrian refugees into the local community (Tumen, 2016).

While Şanlıurfa, a city in southeastern Turkey, has seen a significant influx of Syrian refugees due to its proximity to the Syrian border. This has caused significant shifts in the local labor market, particularly in the agricultural sector and informal employment, with notable consequences for child labor (Fehr & Rijken, 2022).

The agricultural sector in Şanlıurfa has traditionally relied on seasonal and low-wage labor. However, the arrival of a large number of refugees has provided an easily accessible labor force. Many of these job opportunities are informal, which means that workers frequently lack formal contracts, job security, and access to social benefits. Children as young as ten and twelve years old are frequently found working in the fields alongside adults, planting, harvesting, and tending crops. Despite the difficult working conditions and low pay, many of these children accept this work because they have few other options and face legal barriers to formal employment. Furthermore, the influx of refugee labor has impacted local workers, resulting in tensions and increased competition for jobs (Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015).

Also, Hatay, a city in southern Turkey, is in a unique position due to its historical and cultural similarities with Syria. These longstanding ties have greatly aided Syrian refugees' integration into the local community, as evidenced by shared language, customs, and traditions (Esen & Binatlı, 2017).

Syrian refugees in Hatay have made substantial contributions to the local economy. Many people have gotten involved in local businesses, opening shops, restaurants, and other small businesses. However, many Syrian refugees, particularly those without legal residency, work in the informal labor market, including many children. Informal child labor is especially prevalent in the construction industry, where children help carry materials, mix cement, and perform other tasks. Furthermore, many children engage in street vending, selling items like tissues, water, and snacks. Like other cities, the numerous barriers and challenges to entry into the formal labor market force refugees to seek employment in the informal sector to meet their basic living needs (Esen & Binatlı, 2017).

Istanbul has the largest number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, with 563,015 refugees as of 2017, accounting for 3.6% of the province's population. The majority of refugees in Istanbul live in neighborhoods, with 212,816 in camps. Istanbul, along with the eight southern provinces, hosts fifty-seven percentage of Türkiye's Syrian refugees (Yalkin & Cagaptay, 2018).

Integrating such a large population presents demographic, economic, social, and political challenges. Despite the fact that the Turkish government has implemented temporary protection measures, refugees face barriers when obtaining residency and work permits. As

a result, many Syrian refugees work in the informal economy, where they are paid low wages and subjected to poor working conditions (Dara, et al., 2019).

Syrian children in Istanbul face different obstacles due to their refugee status and the ongoing lack of an effective migration policy. If the maternal relationship with a Syrian or Turkish father is unconfirmed or ambiguous, the child is at risk of becoming stateless. Because they lack Turkish citizenship or permanent residency, these children are treated as foreign visitors, impeding their integration into Turkish society (Thomas, 2020).

Also, Syrian refugee children face additional challenges that impact their well-being and assimilation. Financial constraints limit their access to critical resources such as healthcare and education, while linguistic differences impede effective communication and administrative navigation. Furthermore, educational opportunities are limited, as evidenced by the enrollment of only half of Syrian school-aged children. Furthermore, their substandard housing demonstrates a lack of basic necessities such as food and medical care (Kılıç, 2018). The numerous challenges have compelled Syrian children in Istanbul to work in informal sectors to meet their basic needs.

1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of research on child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye by providing a nuanced analysis of the specific sociopolitical factors influencing child labor in Istanbul. While previous studies provide valuable insights at the national level, a more in-depth examination of the challenges that children face in a major metropolitan area such as Istanbul is critical.

This study will investigate how these sociopolitical factors affect Syrian refugee children's working conditions, educational opportunities, social integration, and overall well-being. By focusing on these often-overlooked aspects and using a political science framework, this thesis will help policymakers and NGOs develop and implement effective interventions to combat child labor and improve the well-being of Syrian refugee children in Istanbul.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study intends to analyze the impacts of the engagement of Syrian refugee children in informal market. Therefore, the research has been built around the social conditions of the Syrian refugee children in the informal market in İstanbul. The question that guides this

thesis might simply be formulated as follows: What are the consequences of the informal labor market engagement on the lives of Syrian refugee children in Istanbul?

1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper is divided into six interconnected chapters that investigate and assess the impact of the informal labor market on the future trajectories of Syrian refugee children. The first chapter establishes the research's framework and delineates its significance. It introduces the topic and discusses the motivation and ambition behind entering into a discussion around the Syrian refugee children in the informal market. Furthermore, the chapter put forward the methodology behind the thesis. Chapter two investigates the conceptualization of child labor by reviewing existing literature and with a specific focus on the previous research on the topic. This chapter aims to clarify how scholars and academics perceive and discuss child labor, while also identifying gaps and avenues for future research within the scholarly discourse. Third chapter provides a historical context for the Syrian conflict and refugee crises, delving into the origins of the conflict, the challenges that Syrian refugees face, their displacement, and integration into host countries. Furthermore, it investigates the emergence and spread of child labor in this context. Chapter four examines interviews with ten Syrian children working in Istanbul's informal labor market. Using insights from these interviews and additional sources, this chapter provides a thorough examination of the children's experiences and the implications of their work for their future prospects. Not unexpectedly, in the introducing section of the chapter, methodological framework guiding the whole study has once more been discussed and reiterated.

Chapter five include the findings from previous chapters have been summarized, considering the research's broader implications, and making recommendations for policymakers, organizations, and future research endeavors in this domain. The study finds that, Syrian children who work as children face severe exploitation, which is exacerbated by factors such as early work initiation, limited educational opportunities, and extended working hours. Furthermore, these children suffer from significant psychological distress, owing primarily to their traumatic experiences during the war prior to their arrival in Türkiye. As a result, child labor adds to their already difficult circumstances. Finally, chapter six have been summarized the previous chapters as a conclusion.

2. HOW TO CONCEPTUALIZE CHILD LABOR IN INFORMAL MARKET

Child labor stands as one of humanity's oldest legal and social dilemmas, persisting across generations (Tariq & Ab-Rahim, 2020). Child labor steals a child's childhood by forcing them into work that hinders their education and exposes them to dangers that harm their well-being (Khakshour, Abbasi, Sayedi, Saeidi, & Khodaei, 2015).

Child labor, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), is any form of employment that deprives children of their fundamental rights to a nurturing childhood, their ability to grow, and their sense of dignity, while also endangering their physical and mental well-being. This includes tasks that are harmful to children's mental, physical, social, or ethical well-being, or that interfere with their access to education (Ibrahim, Abdalla, Jafer, Abdelgadir, & de Vries, 2018).

Child labor is a complex and long-standing issue in Türkiye. It predates the arrival of Syrian refugees in the last decade and is caused by a complex interplay of structural factors and inherent characteristics of the Turkish labor market (Fehr & Rijken, 2022).

Child labor is a pervasive issue in Turkish society, with numerous socioeconomic determinants. Pervasive poverty, skewed income distribution, limited access to formal employment opportunities, a lack of strong social safety nets, rapid population growth, rural-urban migration patterns, and deficiencies in the national education system are among the determinants (Akin, 2009). In this context, research highlights the Turkish labor market's informal and precarious nature as a major facilitator of child labor, particularly among Syrian refugees (Yalçın, 2016).

As a result of the conflict in Syria, numerous Syrian children are employed in Türkiye (Dayıoğlu, Kırdar, & Koç, 2023). The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has caused a massive displacement crisis. An estimated 6.8 million Syrians, half of whom are children, have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, primarily Türkiye, Jordan, and Lebanon, with a smaller number fleeing Iraq and Egypt (UNHCR, 2024).

Currently, Türkiye has the world's largest refugee population, with 3.6 million refugees from Syria. Almost half, or 46%, are children under 18 (Sahin, Dagli, Acarturk, & Dagli, 2021).

Despite finding safety from conflict, Syrian refugees in Türkiye encounter uncertainties and vulnerabilities in their new lives. Syrian refugees seeking formal employment in Türkiye face significant barriers due to residency restrictions and limited labor rights (Kaya, 2020). As a result, both adults and children in Syrian refugee communities face high levels of poverty and labor exploitation (Yalçın, 2016).

Syrian refugee households face significant economic hardship due to insufficient primary earner wages, limiting their ability to meet basic needs. Economic insecurity in Syrian refugee households force children to participate in the labor market, exacerbating the problem of child labor. As academic research has shown, the informality and instability inherent in the Turkish labor market exacerbate this phenomenon (İnci, 2016).

A significant body of research has looked into the difficulties that Syrian refugee children face in the labor market. Some have highlighted issues such as long working hours and low wages, while others have focused on the health effects and various contributing factors. In this chapter, I will present diverse literature to understand child labor.

2.1 MAPPING THE LITERATURE ON CHILD LABOR AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES

Empirical research indicates a concerning prevalence of child labor among Syrian refugees in Türkiye. (Dayıoğlu, Kırdar, & Koç, 2023) Using a representative dataset, this study investigates the prevalence of child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye and its relationship to various socioeconomic factors. The findings show that poverty, increased family size, and difficulties integrating into the educational system all significantly increase the likelihood of child labor in this population. It suggests that displacement increases the likelihood of children working and investigates how forced migration affects their time allocation between work, school, and leisure. The researchers used a large dataset from a 2018 survey on Syrians in Türkiye (TDHS). They analyzed it separately for boys and girls, younger (12-14) and older (15-17) children, using regression analysis to identify factors influencing child labor decisions, such as family situation and age at arrival in Türkiye (Dayıoğlu, Kırdar, & Koç, 2023).

The study found high rates of Syrian boys working in Türkiye, especially among older age groups. Factors such as low family income, large households, and living in industrial areas increased the likelihood of child labor. Teenagers who migrated to Türkiye were also more likely to work, indicating challenges in school integration.

Fehr and Rijken have also shed light on this critical issue and discussed several facets of child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye. According to their findings, Syrian children start working at a younger age than their Turkish counterparts and face significant barriers to obtaining an education. The absence of permanent residency for Syrian refugees in Türkiye is seen as a contributing factor to high child labor rates. Additionally, the current prevalence of child labor among Turkish children may create a normative environment that encourages or even incentivizes Syrian refugee children to work. However, it is critical to recognize that these Syrian children will not receive the same educational or developmental benefits from such work. The study used online survey tools available through mobile technology and social media platforms to collect data from Syrian refugees living in Türkiye. Quantitative data from 684 respondents was analyzed to assess their awareness of child labor issues in (Fehr & Rijken, 2022).

According to Yalçın's research, Syrian refugee children in Türkiye often face harsh working conditions due to their families' economic hardships. The author contends that insufficient legal safeguards and limited employment opportunities for adults in the refugee population contribute to the widespread use of child labor. To address this, Yalçın proposes a multi-faceted approach involving individual efforts, stricter law enforcement by businesses, and increased public awareness. The study identifies widespread child labor among Syrian refugees in Türkiye, especially in Istanbul where almost a third of households have working children. According to the finding of the study, it has been underlined that economic hardship drives this trend. This study conducted with a humanitarian agency, gathered field data on working conditions and has underlined the importance of education (Yalçın, 2016). Lordoğlu and Aslan conducted field research to identify child labor among Syrian refugees in Türkiye, specifically examining the working conditions of Syrian children. The study relies on survey data gathered in Istanbul, Mardin, and Urfa. In their study, Lordoglu and Aslan observed that children aged 6 to 14 from Syrian refugee families in Türkiye engage in labor to support their families or due to the incapacity of adult family members to work. They found that many children over the age of 9 contribute financially to their families, regardless of gender. Economic hardship compels families to send their children to work, with Syrian migrant children willing to work in any sector for payment. They accept long hours and low wages, resigning themselves to their inability to attend school due to their work commitments (Lordoğlu & Aslan, 2019).

Dündar and Toplu's research in Istanbul's Küçükçekmece district, specifically the Kanarya region, investigates the potential link between Syrian immigrant women's employment and the prevalence of child labor among this population group. Syrian women commonly work in industries like textiles, leather, and agriculture, where child labor is common. Economic pressures may lead low-income families to send their children to work, while even families with relatively stable financial situations may resort to child labor to supplement their income. Existing research on child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye, despite differences in data collection methods and variations in the relative importance of factors and correlations for child labor, unanimously affirms that economic work and financial hardship for these families have led to sending children at a young age and for low wages to work in order to meet their needs (Dündar & Toplu, 2020).

Esin, Bulduk, and Ince set out to understand the health risks faced by child laborers in Istanbul. They focused on Yenibosna, an industrial district with many low-income immigrant families, believing it represents the broader situation. Their study, which involved interviews, physical exams, and workplace inspections (descriptive, cross-sectional design) revealed significant variations in risks depending on the job. Common hazards included uncomfortable working postures (ergonomic hazards), loud noise, exposure to chemicals, and accidents with sharp tools. These hazards translated into different health problems for children in different jobs, with respiratory problems, skin issues, and upper respiratory tract infections being most frequent (Esin, Bulduk, & Ince, 2005).

Child laborers in Istanbul's Bağcılar textile industry face a grim reality, according to a study by Artan, Arıcı, and colleagues. The researchers, using in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding (qualitative research method), suspect children work excessively long hours (60 per week on average) in difficult conditions. This, coupled with poor nutrition, is believed to lead to health issues like stunted growth, asthma, and fainting. The study further suggests younger male workers are more susceptible to violence. Despite these hardships, the research team believes financial pressure forces these children to work. However, a glimmer of hope exists - the children themselves have aspirations for education, careers, and becoming part of their new community (Artan, Arıcı, Saldüz, Güzel, & Küskün, 2018).

Kandemir, et al, suggest that Syrian refugee children in Türkiye, living outside of camps, are significantly affected by the Syrian civil war and displacement, experiencing distressing events. This study discovers high rates of depression and anxiety in Syrian refugee children,

implying long-term psychological consequences of trauma. They emphasize the importance of formal education for refugee children's well-being, noting barriers to access in Türkiye, alongside a decline in economic conditions for Syrian refugee families.

This study focuses on the mental health of Syrian refugee children living in Türkiye. It focuses on their experiences with war-related trauma and the subsequent prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders. It emphasizes the vital role of education in their integration and resilience while acknowledging the ongoing challenges they face post-resettlement. This study, considered the most extensive of its kind to date, looks at Syrian refugee children in Türkiye. It takes a multifaceted approach, gathering sociodemographic information while also assessing the prevalence of depression and anxiety, as well as exposure to traumatic experiences. The study also found a concerning prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye, which could be attributed to their experiences with war and displacement. It underlined the severe trauma, post-displacement hardships, and educational barriers faced. Parental education impacted access to schooling, and despite fewer war experiences, girls showed higher levels of mental distress (Kandemir, et al., 2018).

In their research, Serap Özer, Selçuk Şirin, and Brit Oppedal proposed that the experience of war could negatively impact the health and overall welfare Syrian refugee children residing in Türkiye. They discovered that mental health concerns in the Islahiye camp are similar to those observed in other conflict zones. The study emphasizes the importance of social support for the children's well-being, and findings from the Bahçeşehir Study shed light on the risks of war for children, informing the public. The study used a sample from the Islahiye camp and assumed generalizability to the larger Syrian refugee child population in Türkiye. The findings revealed that exposure to war caused health and psychological problems for these children, particularly those living in the Islahiye camp (Özer, Sirin, & Oppedal, 2016).

Kızıloğlu's research examines the effect of child labor on the educational attainment of Syrian refugee children. Kızıloğlu argues that child labor is a significant barrier to educational opportunities for Syrian refugee children in Türkiye. Often, child labor compels children to abandon school or attend irregularly, disrupting their education. The necessity to work for family support obstructs Syrian children from fully participating in their education, affecting their academic performance and overall educational achievements. Additionally,

child labor exposes children to unsafe working environments, posing risks to their physical and mental well-being, further impeding their ability to concentrate on their studies. Kızıloğlu uses a mixed-methods approach, including document analysis, policy review, and secondary data analysis, to comprehend the underlying factors contributing to the out-of-school issue among Syrian children in Türkiye (Kızıloğlu , 2021).

A convergence of research on child labor amongst Syrian refugee children in Türkiye reveals a series of recurring themes and conclusions. Firstly, they universally acknowledge that child labor is prevalent among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye and view it as a significant problem. It is commonly acknowledged that the main causes of child labor are the financial difficulties and economic hardships that refugee families endure.

These studies also recognize that various factors contribute to the likelihood of child labor, including poverty, larger family sizes, low family income, and residing in industrial areas. Moreover, the challenges of school integration and limited access to education are consistently highlighted as obstacles that increase the likelihood of Syrian refugee children engaging in child labor. The adverse effects of child labor on the education, health, and overall well-being of Syrian children are consistently emphasized across these studies.

Furthermore, the absence of permanent residency status and legal protections for Syrian refugees in Türkiye is consistently mentioned as a contributing factor to the high rates of child labor. To effectively address this complex issue, the studies uniformly emphasize the importance of adopting multi-faceted approaches that involve individual efforts, stricter enforcement of laws, increased public awareness, and the provision of social support.

The studies on child labor and Syrian refugee children in Türkiye diverge in several aspects. Firstly, they employ diverse research methodologies, including regression analysis, online surveys, field research, interviews, and descriptive cross-sectional designs. Additionally, some studies focus on specific regions or cities within Türkiye, while others provide a broader perspective. There are variations in the specific socioeconomic factors and correlations examined in relation to child labor among the studies. Furthermore, the sample sizes and characteristics of the surveyed population differ across the studies. Some studies specifically delve into the working conditions and sectors where child labor is prevalent, such as textiles, leather, and agriculture. Moreover, the emphasis on the mental health effects of war and displacement on Syrian refugee children varies among the studies. Lastly, while

all studies acknowledge the impact of child labor on education, the extent and specific consequences discussed may differ.

Although the literature extensively addresses the prevalence, underlying factors, and diverse outcomes associated with child labor among Syrian refugee children throughout Türkiye, there exists a notable gap in understanding the intricate experiences and specific consequences encountered by Syrian children residing in Istanbul. While many studies provide a broad overview of child labor among Syrian refugees across Türkiye, there is a lack of detailed examination regarding the unique challenges and outcomes experienced by children living specifically in Istanbul, a prominent destination for Syrian refugees. Furthermore, while existing research delves into the immediate health and educational impacts of child labor, such as stunted growth and school absenteeism, there is a deficiency in comprehensive studies investigating the long-term psychological and social consequences faced by Syrian refugee children, including conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and challenges with social integration into adulthood.

Additionally, while current research primarily emphasizes the negative consequences of child labor, there is limited exploration of the coping mechanisms developed by Syrian refugee children to navigate the stress and trauma associated with their labor experiences. Therefore, this study intends to contribute to the existing research on child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye, by offering a nuanced understanding of the specific socio-political factors influencing child labor in Istanbul by also shedding limited light on the survival mechanisms of these youngsters

The existing research provides valuable insights at the national level, yet a more detailed understanding of the challenges that children face in a major metropolitan setting such as Istanbul is required. This research will also explore how these socio-political factors shape the working experiences of Syrian refugee children, on their ability to access education but also their broader social integration and overall well-being.

Additionally, this thesis attempts to generate significant knowledge resources for policymakers and NGOs by investigating underexplored aspects of child labor among Syrian refugee children in Istanbul and using a political science framework. This knowledge will be useful in developing and implementing effective interventions to combat child labor and promote the well-being of this vulnerable population.

2.2 POTENTIAL GAPS AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the large body of research on the phenomenon of child labor among Syrian refugees in Türkiye, there are significant gaps and unanswered questions. For example, among the numerous challenges affecting these children's lives and prospects, social underdevelopment is often overlooked. This study, which involved in-depth interviews with Syrian minors working in Istanbul, discovered significant but previously overlooked barriers. The fourth chapter will provide a thorough discussion and analysis of the interview findings, with a focus on the specific socioeconomic and psychological challenges that these children face. This chapter will provide a thorough examination of the interview data, shedding light on the nuanced experiences and systemic issues that contribute to the problem of child labor among Syrian refugee children in Istanbul.

A significant proportion of these working minors lack social engagement, such as participation in community activity peer interactions. This social interaction deficit foreshadows future difficulties in cultivating mature and functional interpersonal relationships. Childhood, as the foundation for subsequent developmental stages, is marked by increased self-discovery before social integration. As a result, the question arises: how can long hours of labor provide these children with the opportunity to explore their surroundings and understand relational dynamics?

Childhood is a critical period of self-discovery and personal growth. However, working minors face significant limitations in this regard due to a lack of time and energy to explore their surroundings or pursue potential hobbies. Their lack of participation in activities that promote self-exploration hinders their ability to develop a strong sense of self and understand their own needs and desires in relation to others, both in the short and long term (NAEYC, 2020).

Furthermore, previous research has primarily emphasized children's long working hours while failing to thoroughly investigate the implications for these individuals. Temporal constraints may increase these children's susceptibility to engaging in maladaptive social behaviors. It is possible that in a work environment with people of all ages, certain peers may act as compensatory figures for feelings of isolation, frustration, and hostility, potentially leading to the adoption of risky behaviors such as substance abuse or alcohol consumption. Some of the previously mentioned studies investigated the phenomenon of

child labor and its educational implications. However, their findings do not adequately illuminate the negative consequences of children's non-enrollment in formal schooling.

Children who engage in labor activities rather than education have different cognitive orientations than their peers of the same age. As a result, the importance of education is diminished in their perceptions, as they prioritize employment to meet basic needs. Consequently, this perpetuates intergenerational poverty cycles. Furthermore, their future employment prospects are limited because they are still trapped in low-wage jobs with no development opportunities.

When children choose to work instead of going to school, they tend to undervalue work. This leaves children with two options: complete school dropout or concurrent schooling and employment, albeit with a lower emphasis on academic achievement. As a result, children are immersed in occupational settings with repetitive tasks and limited skill acquisition opportunities, which eliminates opportunities for career advancement. The importance of educational deprivation stems from its role as a facilitator of cognitive maturation and the acquisition of various competencies via educational mediums such as literature and technology, etc. (Secretariat, 2016).

Another important factor to consider is researchers' recognition of the economic imperative that drives child labor, in which parental or familial inability to adequately meet financial needs compels children to work. This phenomenon frequently disrupts the family structure and interpersonal dynamics. For example, imposing financial responsibilities on children results in a deficit in the care and emotional support that their families are traditionally expected to provide. Furthermore, as previously stated, certain families show differential treatment to their children, allocating some to formal education and others to labor participation (Insights, 2024).

Considering the points raised above, in the aftermath of the Syrian war, many children have sought refuge in Türkiye, often having lost both parents or one parent and arriving with a relative. Some children arrived with their entire families; however, the Türkiye-Syria earthquake in early 2023 resulted in the loss of additional parental figures for many. The unintended consequence of such losses is that children who lose their parents experience increased depression and anxiety, making emotional regulation difficult. The lack of parental support causes financial instability, forcing these young people to navigate life at a young

age in a host country where meeting their basic needs becomes difficult (Böckerman, Haapanen, & Jepsen, 2023).

As an outcome, many children are forced into child labor. The lack of parental supervision and support exacerbates the trauma and burdens of life, with more serious long-term consequences as these children grow and form their own families. This is especially true when they also have to support their siblings, which adds to their burden (Hanson, Axberg, & Bergman, 2017).

However, the study mentioned above fails to address the consequences of such intra-familial disparities. It is reasonable to expect feelings of resentment and hostility among siblings as a result of these preferential arrangements, causing current and future familial discord. This creates a competitive environment, especially when advantageous opportunities arise for educated children in comparison to their peers who work in informal labor environments.

Notably, the impacts of child labor are profound and vary between boys and girls. However, much of the existing literature fails to adequately address these gender-specific consequences, typically examining child labor without accounting for the child's gender. Consequently, given the evident disparities between the experiences of boys and girls, these differences often result in distinct inequalities and disadvantages for each gender.

According to a Save the Children article, gender norms are social principles that regulate girls' behaviors differently than boys. These norms limit their gender identity to what society considers acceptable. In basic terms, girls are typically assigned more household chores than boys and are expected to provide healthcare at home for minimal compensation. They frequently face the challenge of a "double burden," having to balance employment with domestic responsibilities such as housework (Org, 2024).

However, discrimination and gender inequality have unintended consequences for girls involved in child labor. They are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence, which includes sexual abuse and harassment. This risk is heightened by the isolating nature of their work, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation (Commission's, 2021).

Simultaneously, it does not imply that boys are immune to the consequences of gender bias, as male children involved in child labor bear the burden of prematurely taking on adult responsibilities. This imposition causes psychological and physical stress in boys because

they are assigned difficult tasks beyond their age and developmental stage solely because of their gender (O'kane, 2018).

The phenomenon of child labor has different effects on boys and girls, influenced by entrenched gender norms that dictate divergent societal roles. Girls are often burdened with domestic and caregiving responsibilities, making them more vulnerable to gender-based violence. Boys, on the other hand, face unrealistic expectations of adulthood, causing psychological and physical stress. It is critical to address gender disparities in child labor in order to promote equity and protect children's overall well-being around the world.

In the end, the issue of child labor among Syrian refugee children in Türkiye is multifaceted, with social, psychological, and economic components. Despite extensive research, significant gaps exist, particularly in terms of the children's social and developmental outcomes. Examples include a lack of social engagement and the negative effects of trauma and parental loss on emotional and financial stability. To address child labor among Syrian refugees in Türkiye, it is necessary to recognize its complex implications as well as gaps in our understanding of its multifaceted social, psychological, and gender-specific dimensions. Comprehensive strategies must address social underdevelopment, educational deprivation, intra-familial conflict, and gender disparities. It is critical to prioritize equitable access to education and financial resources, as well as the elimination of gender norms. We can aspire to a future free of exploitative labor by advocating for children's rights and working together to create a more equitable and just society.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHILD LABOR

Developing a historical perspective involves recognizing the historical social, cultural, and intellectual settings that influenced societies' decisions and ways of living. It seems impossible to analyze the subject in question without employing a historical perspective. Therefore, this chapter intends to give a clear understanding of the historical context of child labor among refugees, as well as details on economic, social, and political context. It will also identify the factors that have contributed to the widespread use of child labor by refugee children in the informal sector. In general, this chapter will include several key headings to help readers understand the history of child labor.

3.1 CHILD LABOR: A BRIEF DEFINITION

Child labor is the exploitation of children by putting them to work that interferes with their regular school attendance and poses significant risks to their mental, physical, social, and moral growth. It is critical to note that not all types of work done by children constitute child labor. Certain activities, such as assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside of school hours and during holidays, are generally regarded positively because they promote children's development and benefit their families (ILO, 1999).

Child labor is defined by the International Labor Organization as "work that deprives children of their childhood, dignity, and potential, as well as being harmful to their physical and mental development." Despite the fact that the United States has successfully eliminated child labor through strict legislation, the phenomenon persists in low- and middle-income countries, with varying factors and causes (ILO, 1999).

The term is defined by the United States Department of Labor as the employment of people under the minimum age required by national laws, the performance of hazardous unpaid household tasks, and the most severe forms of exploitation. These worst forms include all forms of slavery or similar practices, such as the sale or trafficking of children, debt bondage, forced or compulsory labor, and the exploitation of children for prostitution, pornography, illegal activities, or work that is likely to endanger their health, safety, or morals (Labor U. D., 2010).

In 2016, the International Labor Organization conducted a statistical survey to estimate the number of children exploited in child labor, revealing 152 million children, 73 million of whom worked in dangerous conditions. The majority of child laborers (48%) ranged in age from 5 to 11 years old. Domestic labor and agriculture are two of the most common types of work for children (Lee, 2021).

Child labor is frequently clandestine, making precise and adequate information about its effects on children difficult to obtain. For example, there is insufficient data on the number of patients or individuals impacted by their work. Nonetheless, the International Labor Organization estimates that 22,000 children are killed in labor each year (Commission's, 2021).

3.2 A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON CHILD LABOR

3.2.1 Child Labor Global Overview

Throughout history, children's societal roles have been inextricably linked to the economic and social frameworks that prevail. From ancient civilizations to pre-industrial societies, children played critical roles in familial and communal contexts, taking on responsibilities and contributing significantly to household economies at a young age. These contributions were not incidental; they were critical to the survival and functioning of families and communities (Humphries, *Child Labor: Lessons from the Historical Experience*, 2003).

In pre-industrial communities, children were frequently involved in family-based agricultural labor and domestic responsibilities, which were typically appropriate for their age. Their contributions to the household economy were substantial, as they assisted with tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings (Yılmaz, 2020).

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Great Britain became the first country to industrialize. As a result, it was the first country in which the nature of children's work changed so dramatically that child labor became recognized as a social and political issue (Tuttle, 2001).

The advent of the Industrial Revolution marked a significant shift in the nature of child labor. The rise of factories created a large demand for labor, and children became the preferred workforce due to their perceived obedience and submissiveness, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. This period saw a shift from home-based manual labor to factory work, with children working in large numbers alongside adults to meet the growing demands

of capitalist production. Many families were forced to send their children to work in factories in order to make ends meet, resulting in the formal recognition of child labor as a separate category. Concurrently, societal attitudes towards children began to shift, influenced by the Renaissance and Reform movements. Middle- and upper-class children were increasingly viewed as requiring education and care, reflecting a shift away from their economic roles and toward their psychological and educational development. By the nineteenth century, children in Western societies were more commonly viewed as individuals who required nurturing and education for the future. However, this shift was not universal and varied greatly depending on class and regional factors (Yilmaz, 2020).

For example, in Victorian England, child labor was commonplace. Children worked in harsh conditions, especially in coal mines, where their small size was advantageous. They worked twelve to eighteen hours per day for less pay than adults. The dangerous work environment caused many people to develop respiratory problems, vision loss, and spinal problems. Victorian-era jobs were hazardous, with children as young as three employed to clean chimneys, often resulting in injuries and reduced life expectancy. Safety precautions were non-existent, leading to high rates of injury and death. Children faced physical punishment and financial penalties for minor infractions (Price, 2013).

Additionally, capitalism was responsible for rapid industrialization and economic expansion during the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism is an economic system characterized by individuals and corporations competing for profit through the production and exchange of goods, with a focus on private ownership of production means and a free market system. This shift has modern parallels, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries where economic hardships, poverty, and a lack of educational opportunities force families to rely on their children's earnings (Pereira, 2022).

The informal economy in developing countries makes a significant contribution to the persistence of child labor. Many children work in unregulated and often hazardous conditions, with labor laws either weakly enforced or completely absent. The lack of access to quality education exacerbates the problem, as children who do not attend school are more likely to work. Furthermore, cultural norms and practices can influence the prevalence of child labor. In some societies, children are expected to contribute to the family income from an early age, and their labor is regarded as an important part of their upbringing and

socialization. These cultural attitudes can make combating child labor difficult, even with legal and policy measures alone (Yılmaz, 2020).

Employers in developing countries frequently employ children for a variety of reasons, which are heavily influenced by economic, social, and legal considerations. Employers view child labor as cost-effective because it allows them to pay significantly lower wages than adult workers, reducing labor costs and increasing profit margins. Child labor, on the other hand, is typically associated with a lack of benefits, such as health insurance, paid leave entitlements, or retirement provisions, which are frequently denied to these young workers by employers. Furthermore, children may be more willing to work long or irregular hours without objecting. Given children's limited ability to negotiate, the bargaining dynamics between children and employers are heavily skewed, reducing their chances of requesting higher wages or better working conditions (Van & Basu, 1998).

And because of the high levels of poverty in developing countries, there is a high demand for child labor, which makes it easy for employers to exploit. Families facing economic hardship are frequently forced to send their children to work out of necessity. Unfortunately, effective legislative and regulatory frameworks aimed at reducing child labor and protecting children are frequently absent. Corruption and bribery contribute to the weak enforcement of existing legal provisions, allowing employers to exploit children more effectively. Furthermore, governments in developing countries frequently lack the resources needed to effectively enforce labor laws, conduct thorough inspections, and take legal action against violators (Benjet, 2010).

Moreover, these countries have cultural traditions that view child labor as customary and integral to developmental stages. These communities are typically based on familial enterprises, with children frequently working in agriculture or small-scale commerce. Furthermore, many of these households follow a cultural norm that does not regard formal education as directly relevant or advantageous to children's future career prospects, favoring work over educational pursuits (Ray, 2000).

Furthermore, underdeveloped countries are in a more precarious position than developed countries. These countries typically rely on primary sector activities and a small number of primary exports, such as raw materials and agricultural products. They have little industrial activity, poor infrastructure, and limited technological advancement. In terms of human

development indicators, these countries frequently score low, indicating poor health outcomes, low levels of educational attainment, and poor living conditions. Additionally, these countries frequently experience political instability and poor governance, which impedes or eliminates the enforcement of laws (Gylfason , 2001).

In short, child labor persists in underdeveloped nations due to economic imperatives, cultural practices, and governance challenges. Poverty compels families to utilize children for income generation, exacerbated by inadequate educational opportunities. Employers exploit children's labor due to lax enforcement of labor laws. Cultural norms that normalize child labor complicate mitigation efforts. Effective strategies must address poverty alleviation, educational access, and robust enforcement of legal protections to effectively combat this pervasive issue and promote the welfare of children.

According to The Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB) compiles a list of goods and developing countries that are suspected of using child or forced labor in violation of international standards. This list aims to raise global awareness about the issue of forced child labor. It is not intended to be punitive, but rather to act as a catalyst for strategic coordination and cooperation among stakeholders working to solve this problem (Affairs, List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, 2022).

In Pakistan and El Salvador, for example, evidence suggests that children aged five to seventeen are employed in the baking industry. These children work long hours, lift heavy loads, and are subjected to toxic fumes and high humidity. Açaí berries are harvested by children as young as eight in Brazil, according to reports. This job requires climbing tall, slender trees without safety equipment, handling knives, and being exposed to dangerous wildlife and extreme heat. In Burma, forced child labor accounts for up to forty percentage of the bamboo industry's workforce. Children as young as ten years old are forced to do this work for no pay, and if they refuse, they face physical violence or punishment. Another example of forced labor is the illegal extraction of amber in Ukraine, which involves children as young as seven years old. These children are especially vulnerable to risks in the Polissia region, where they may face injuries and violence on mining sites (Affairs, List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor, 2022).

Also, since the 1970s, neoliberal economic policies have brought about significant changes in global labor practices, fundamentally altering the dynamics of child labor around the world. The rise of neoliberal economic doctrines, characterized by deregulation,

privatization, and advocacy for unfettered markets, has resulted in significant shifts in labor dynamics, which frequently exploit vulnerable demographics such as children (Yüksel, 2017).

The spread of neoliberal principles as a result of globalization and initiatives by institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank has fueled capital market expansion and increased competitive pressures. As a result, this environment has frequently sparked a race to lower labor standards, prompting businesses to seek cost savings by employing low-wage workers, including children. The transition from industrial to service-oriented economies, as well as the emergence of informal and intangible labor sectors, have opened up new opportunities for child labor exploitation. In the neoliberal era, child labor has expanded beyond traditional sectors to include roles in the media and entertainment industries, particularly in major urban centers such as Istanbul. The growing use of child performers in advertisements, television shows, and film productions reflects changing labor market dynamics and the commercialization of childhood. While these forms of labor are less physically demanding, they raise serious ethical and regulatory concerns about the exploitation and safety of child workers (Yılmaz, 2020).

In contrast, the United States dealt with child labor in four distinct phases: During the first period (around 1941), America emphasized the importance of removing children from the workplace and encouraging them to attend school to complete their education. Second period, (Post-World War II), a shift in emphasis due to an alleged labor shortage needed for wartime production. The third period began in the (late 1940s), with the goal of addressing the issue of older youth who were not attending school to receive an education while also being unemployed. Finally, in the fourth period, in the (late 1980s), child labor almost vanished from the political landscape. (Mayer, 2012).

In the end, the history of child labor demonstrates its deep connection to economic systems, social frameworks, and cultural practices across multiple historical periods and regions. Children have been an integral part of family economies throughout history, from ancient civilizations to the Industrial Revolution and beyond. They are frequently forced to work due to economic necessity and social norms. The transition from agrarian to industrial societies accelerated child labor, exploiting their vulnerability for financial gain.

While some developed countries have made progress in eradicating child labor through legislative measures and societal shifts toward education and child welfare, many developing countries continue to face widespread child labor. Poverty, limited educational opportunities, cultural attitudes, and lax enforcement of labor laws all contribute to its persistence. Globalization and neoliberal economic policies have complicated efforts to eliminate child labor, resulting in new forms of exploitation in the service and entertainment industries. Addressing this complex issue requires a multifaceted approach, including poverty alleviation, universal access to quality education, strict labor law enforcement, and international cooperation to combat global supply chains that perpetuate child labor. Efforts must also consider cultural contexts when promoting children's rights and ensuring their safety and wellbeing. Only through concerted global action can we effectively eliminate child labor and ensure a future in which all children can thrive without being exploited.

3.2.2 Child Labor in Türkiye: Historical and Current Perspectives

The history of child labor in Türkiye can be divided into several stages. This practice persisted throughout the Ottoman Empire's late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, affecting mining, manufacturing, and agriculture. Despite earning low wages and working long hours, families in extreme poverty frequently force their children to work. Although the Ottoman government attempted to regulate this issue, enforcement was frequently lax. During the early years of the Republic (1923-1950), significant and concrete efforts were made to combat child labor. The Turkish government passed strict legislation to protect children and their rights from exploitation by the labor force. Despite these efforts, eradication was not complete, particularly in rural areas where poverty and limited access to education exacerbated the problem (Balsoy, 2009).

Following the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, the government implemented a variety of economic reforms to modernize the country's economy. These reforms included a market-oriented strategy, promotion of industrialization, and facilitation of foreign investment. Concurrently, government initiatives aided the growth of key industries such as textiles, mining, and manufacturing. Family-owned enterprises, also known as "holding companies," which are primarily controlled by influential families and operate in a variety of economic domains, played a significant role in Türkiye's modern capitalism evolution. The Koç family, for example, founded a commercial conglomerate in

the 1920s and went on to become the country's most diverse business entity. However, the development of modern capitalism in Türkiye faced challenges such as capital scarcity and a shortage of skilled labor. These obstacles frequently resulted in labor exploitation, particularly the widespread use of child labor in agriculture, textiles, and manufacturing sectors, which are characterized by hazardous working conditions and long hours (Güven, 2022).

Since 1923, the evolution of modern capitalism in Türkiye has been complex and multifaceted, shaped by significant political, economic, and social changes. Despite significant economic progress, the presence of child labor in this era requires recognition (Güven, 2022). After that, Türkiye experienced significant political and economic changes in the 1930s under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish Republic's founder and inaugural president. The government of Atatürk believed that Türkiye needed to industrialize quickly in order to compete with Western nations. As a result, state-owned businesses were established in critical industries such as mining, transportation, and manufacturing. The Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) policy was implemented to reduce reliance on imports and promote domestic production (Akgül, 2019).

During this period, the government pursued a centrally planned economic strategy that prioritized infrastructure development and industrial growth. Initial plans called for a large workforce, including child labor in some sectors. The progress of industrialization resulted in significant rural-to-urban migration, causing economic hardship for many families. As a result, many families forced their children to work to supplement the household income. Despite the Republican People's Party's strict control over the political scene, which ensured stability and the implementation of state policies, the issue of child labor received little political attention. There were no adequate and comprehensive labor laws to limit child labor, allowing it to continue despite the state's modernization aspirations (Takim & Yilmaz, 2011). After that, Türkiye's economic evolution in the post-World War II era, which lasted from 1946 to 1960, was heavily influenced by the Marshall Plan, officially known as the European Recovery Program, which provided critical economic aid to war-torn European countries, including Türkiye. This initiative aimed to boost economic recovery, stabilize currencies, and promote regional political stability. From 1960 to 1980, Türkiye pursued a course characterized by planned economic policies, including protective measures such as higher tariffs and import controls to support domestic industries (Özek, 2020).

The establishment of a neoliberal economic phase in 1980, led by Prime Minister Turgut Özal, marked a watershed moment in Türkiye's economic strategy. This period saw a shift away from inward-oriented economic policies and toward market-oriented reforms, aided by deregulation, trade liberalization, and initiatives to attract foreign investment. The privatization of state-owned enterprises, such as telecommunications, banking, and manufacturing, was central to these neoliberal reforms. This restructuring aimed to increase job creation and industrial growth. Nonetheless, the benefits of economic expansion were unevenly distributed, contributing to long-standing income disparities and regional inequalities. The expansion of public sectors during this time period significantly increased the labor force, including segments that unfortunately included child labor, shaping important aspects of Türkiye's economic landscape (Mohiuddin, 2023).

Türkiye also implemented agricultural reforms to increase productivity, optimize land distribution, and promote rural development. Government initiatives included funding irrigation projects, improving agricultural education, and introducing new farming technologies. Concurrently, efforts were made to advance manufacturing, establish free trade zones, and grow export-oriented industries. These transformations highlighted the importance of expanding the workforce in these sectors to keep pace with technological advancements and economic growth (Britannica, 2024).

In summary, this historical examination of child labor in Turkey reveals its continued presence from the late Ottoman period to the present day. Despite legislative interventions and economic reforms, the analysis shows that socioeconomic factors such as poverty and limited educational access, combined with sectoral labor demands, have perpetuated child labor. Turkey's evolving capitalist structure, marked by rapid industrialization and economic restructuring, creates a complex landscape in which child labor coexists with advancements. As the country moves toward greater economic development and social well-being, eliminating child labor requires addressing its root causes and enforcing stricter regulations. On the other hand, Türkiye has seen significant migration over the years, complicating the issue of child labor. Following the Ottoman Empire's demise and the Turkish War of Independence, many refugees from the Balkans, Caucasus, Crimea, and Greece sought asylum in Türkiye. Between 1923 and the mid-1990s, over 1.6 million people fled to Türkiye because of Balkan and Iranian conflicts.

Recently, Türkiye has faced a massive migrant crisis, particularly with over 3.6 million Syrian refugees fleeing civil war (Kaya, 2020). Furthermore, there has been an influx of Afghan refugees because of political instability and conflict in Afghanistan (Sazak, 2021). These migrations have exacerbated Türkiye's efforts to manage the refugee crisis. The high number of refugee children has made it difficult to integrate them into the informal labor market while protecting their rights.

The historical overview of child labor reveals its enduring presence in various regions and time periods. Child labor persists due to complex socioeconomic factors such as poverty, limited access to education, and migration crises, dating back to the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom and continuing in countries like Türkiye. To address child labor on a global scale, comprehensive strategies that address underlying socioeconomic factors, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and promote educational access are required. International cooperation is critical in assisting countries such as Türkiye in managing migration crises and ensuring the rights of all children.

3.3 THE ROLE OF SYRIAN WAR AND THE CHILD LABOR IN ISTANBUL

3.3.1 Syrian War

Syria, known for its historical significance and central position in the Middle East, has long wielded significant influence over regional dynamics and global affairs. Nonetheless, the country is currently embroiled in a protracted civil war, distinguished by its duration and the lack of viable paths to a peaceful resolution.

The 2010 protests in Tunisia sparked a widespread movement that reverberated across the Middle East, culminating in what is now known as the Arab Spring. This series of sociopolitical upheavals began in 2012 and included a wave of demonstrations and revolutions throughout the region (Vaessen, 2014).

Following the successful uprisings that resulted in the deposition of Tunisia and Egypt's presidents, Syrian proponents of democratic reform found renewed hope in 2011. Despite initial peaceful protests in Syria that same year, the government responded violently, resulting in numerous casualties and widespread arrests. The formation of the Free Syrian Army by defected military personnel marked a significant turning point, heralding the start of armed conflict and Syria's descent into war (Al-Jazeera, 2018).

As the protests grew in number and intensity, the government responded by deploying military assets such as tanks, artillery, and attack helicopters to besiege the cities of Baniyas and Homs, effectively cutting off essential services and communication networks in response to their emergence as focal points of dissent. In response to the increased repression, some protesters took up arms against security forces. Following that, Syrian military units supported by armored vehicles advanced into the northern town of Jisr al-Shughour, forcing a mass exodus of refugees, many of whom sought refuge in neighboring Türkiye (Britannica T. , 2024).

The Syrian conflict has had serious and long-term consequences for families, resulting in widespread displacement both within and outside of Syria. Many families have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries due to the need to protect their children's well-being and future prospects. This displacement has put a strain on host nations' resources and infrastructure, exacerbating difficulties in meeting basic needs such as housing, food, and medical care. The conflict's toll goes beyond material losses, with significant civilian and combatant casualties. Families have experienced the anguish of losing loved ones, as well as the need to relocate to safer areas. Furthermore, the conflict has taken a heavy toll on critical infrastructure, such as educational facilities, residential dwellings, healthcare facilities, and basic utilities, which has had a significant impact on affected families' daily lives (Laub, 2023).

In terms of economic consequences, a significant proportion of these households lost their primary source of income, resulting in increased poverty and unemployment rates. The conflict caused a significant increase in inflation rates, precipitating a severe economic downturn. Furthermore, the devaluation of the Syrian currency and the suspension of trade exacerbated economic challenges. Concurrently, Syrian families face formidable humanitarian challenges in ensuring adequate medical care and educational opportunities for their children. The conflict has precipitated a significant humanitarian crisis, characterized by a lack of accessible healthcare provisions and potable water sources, resulting in an increase in disease prevalence and malnutrition rates (Heydemann, 2023).

To summarize, the situation for Syrian refugee children in Istanbul presents a complex set of challenges with serious consequences for their well-being and future prospects. The combination of factors such as limited housing resources, limited government assistance, and barriers to obtaining work permits emphasizes the precarious situation in which these

children find themselves. Furthermore, the disproportionate burden placed on educational facilities, compounded by linguistic barriers, highlights the systemic barriers to obtaining a quality education. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and reliance on informal sector employment, especially among children, exacerbating social tensions in host communities. The threat of deportation compounds these difficulties, limiting mobility and exacerbating vulnerabilities. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions that prioritize access to education, formal employment opportunities, and legal protections to protect the rights and well-being of Syrian refugee children in Istanbul and elsewhere.

3.3.2 Barriers to Formal Employment and Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Istanbul

Syrian refugees face a number of formidable obstacles, particularly for children. Several key factors have contributed to the increase of Syrian child labor in the informal sector. The large number of refugees has put significant strain on housing resources and government support systems, resulting in limited access to affordable and suitable housing. Furthermore, a significant portion of these refugees face the challenge of obtaining consistent employment and generating adequate income to sustain themselves and their families. This has forced many refugee families to live in overcrowded and inadequate conditions, making it difficult to meet their basic needs (Aburas, Najeeb, Baageel, & Mackey, 2018).

Unfortunately, empirical research shows that children account for fifty percentage of the refugee population, exacerbating the barriers to educational access. Educational facilities are overburdened, with limited resources and language barriers. Without proper education, these children have few opportunities for future employment, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and reliance on child labor. As a result, this situation creates an additional challenge: the escalation of social tensions and the strain on intercommunal relations. Factors such as competition for resources and cultural differences exacerbate communication gaps between host communities and refugees (Bank). Due to the lack of work permits, a large number of Syrian refugees, particularly children, work in the informal sector, limiting their access to formal employment opportunities. Adults in the family who do not have work permits can lose significant income, making it difficult to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Obtaining a work permit is a time-consuming and costly process for refugees looking for formal employment. The application process requires a six-month residency period, and permits must be renewed annually (Kirişci & Uysal, 2019).

In host countries, such as Istanbul, the high cost of living presents a formidable challenge for refugee households, especially in the absence of formal employment opportunities. As a result, children may feel compelled to work to supplement family income and alleviate financial strains. This phenomenon emphasizes the socioeconomic pressures that refugee communities face, as well as the complex interplay between economic insecurity and child labor practices in such settings (Milner, 2009).

Deportation is a major concern for Syrian refugees living in Istanbul, many of whom lack proper documentation, making them vulnerable to arrest. Türkiye has placed geographical restrictions on its adherence to the UN Refugee Convention, placing refugees arriving at its eastern and southern borders under the "Temporary Protection" framework. Under this regime, refugees are required to live and work solely in the province in which they were registered, limiting their mobility and potentially subjecting them to deportation if discovered to be living or working elsewhere.

Turkish authorities in several provinces, including Istanbul, have suspended registration for both temporary and international protection status. This measure gives authorities legal legitimacy, increasing the likelihood of deportation for those caught living or working in these restricted provinces (Watch, 2022).

3.4 CHILD LABOR: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

3.4.1 Global perspective

Child labor is a serious violation of human rights, prompting extensive international efforts to develop legal frameworks and protective measures aimed at eliminating it. Historically, a number of global initiatives have been launched to address this critical issue. In 2020, approximately 160 million children were involved in child labor, accounting for ten percent of the global child population. This included 97 million males and 63 million females. Notably, 79 million of these children, or half of the child labor force, were working in hazardous conditions. Furthermore, approximately one-third of the children involved in child labor did not attend school (Vision, 2022).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has established key standards for combating child labor. The Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (No. 138) establishes the general minimum age for employment as fifteen years (with a provision for light work beginning at

thirteen years) and eighteen years as the minimum age for hazardous work, with flexibility based on a country's economic and educational development.

Furthermore, the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention of 1999 (No. 182) defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 and requires ratifying states to prohibit the worst forms of child labor. This includes combating slavery, forced labor, child prostitution, and dangerous jobs. The convention also emphasizes the importance of providing education and vocational training to children who have been removed from these severe conditions (ILO, 1999). Also, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a comprehensive human rights treaty that defines the rights of people under the age of 18, covering a wide range of child protection issues, including child labor. This treaty has been nearly universally ratified, with the notable exception of the United States (resolution, 1989).

Enacted in 1938, The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) regulates child labor and hazardous working conditions while also establishing minimum wage requirements. It is a federal law in the United States that limits the daily working hours of people under the age of eighteen and specifies the types of jobs they can do. Furthermore, the FLSA includes provisions to protect minors working in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (Writer, 2024).

Moreover, throughout the years, many countries have passed national laws to combat child labor. These laws vary by country, but they all aim to protect children from exploitation while also providing for their education and well-being. For instance, in Bangladesh, the Labor Act of 2006 and the Children's Act of 1974 provide protections for children's rights and prohibit child labor. In India, the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act of 2000 aim to prevent and regulate child labor. Similarly, Nepal has enacted the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 2000 and the Bonded Labor Prohibition Act of 2002 to combat child labor and safeguard children's rights (Waves).

3.4.2 Türkiye's Legislation on Child Labor

Turkish child labor legislation is primarily concerned with protecting children's rights and welfare. The following are the fundamental aspects of Turkish child labor legislation. Türkiye has stringent laws in place to prevent child labor. Türkiye has prohibited the employment of children under the age of 15, as well as limiting working children aged fifteen to eighteen (Labor U. S., 2018).

The Turkish government has established institutional mechanisms to enforce child labor laws. The Ministry of Family, Labor, and Social Services (MOFLSS) is responsible for enforcing child labor laws and coordinating services for street children. A hotline has been established to receive complaints about violations of children's rights. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security's General Directorate of Labor are currently implementing the National Program for the Elimination of Child Labor. It also supervises all activities aimed at eliminating this phenomenon, including programs and policies.

Türkiye has also emphasized the establishment of the Directorate of Labor Inspection and Guidance, which regulates child labor working conditions and monitors the enforcement of labor law provisions within its jurisdiction. Most importantly, the General Directorate of Turkish National Police and Gendarmerie enforces criminal laws that govern the most dangerous and severe forms of child labor, such as human trafficking (Affairs, 2018 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, 2018).

Türkiye has implemented a number of measures to protect Syrian children from child labor, with contributions from government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations. These initiatives are designed to address the unique challenges that Syrian refugee minors face, including provisions for education, vocational skill development, psychological support, and legal safeguards. To combat instances of child labor among refugee populations, Türkiye has worked collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders. These are the essential components of Türkiye's initiatives to protect Syrian children from exploitation.

The Turkish government has launched a new five-year national action plan to combat child labor, with a particular emphasis on protecting Syrian children from exploitation. This comprehensive initiative demonstrates Türkiye's commitment to addressing the multifaceted issues related to child labor.

Concurrently, efforts have been intensified to strengthen legal protections for Syrian minors, including the formation of specialized administrative bodies tasked with coordinating policy formulation and enforcing existing child labor laws. Furthermore, the establishment of dedicated hotlines serves as an important mechanism for receiving reports and addressing instances of child rights violations, including cases of child labor, thereby improving governmental authorities' responsiveness to these concerns (Labor U. S., 2018).

Also, vocational training programs are being implemented to provide Syrian youth with the necessary skills for future employment opportunities, serve as viable alternatives to child labor practices, and promote sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, a variety of organizations, including non-governmental organizations and international agencies, provide tailored psychosocial support services to meet the emotional and psychological needs of Syrian children affected by conflict. By focusing on these aspects, these programs help to reduce children's vulnerability to exploitation (Labor U. D., 2010).

All in all, the global effort to combat child labor requires a multifaceted approach that includes international treaties, domestic statutes, enforcement mechanisms, and specialized interventions tailored to specific contexts like Türkiye's, particularly in addressing the plight of vulnerable groups such as Syrian refugee children. Legal frameworks, such as those established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and individual countries, are critical components in eradicating child labor and ensuring children's rights and well-being. Türkiye's legislative provisions and initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to this cause through rigorous legal measures, institutional infrastructures, targeted programs, and collaborative engagements with a wide range of stakeholders, with the goal of providing education, vocational training, psychosocial support, and legal protections to prevent and eradicate child labor, particularly among Syrian refugee minors.

4. SYRIAN CHILD LABORERS IN ISTANBUL

This chapter discusses in depth the research methodology used in this study. It describes the research design, justifies the use of semi-structured interviews, and explains the participant selection process. It also describes the data collection procedures as well as the data analysis techniques. Ethical considerations, validity and reliability measurements, and the study's limitations are also discussed. The goal is to provide a thorough understanding of the research process and the methods used to ensure that the findings are robust.

4.1 METHODOLOGY: THROUGH SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

This study uses a qualitative research design to delve into the participants' complex experiences and perspectives. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for this research because they allow for a thorough examination of complex phenomena and produce rich, detailed data that quantitative approaches may not adequately capture.

A semi-structured interview is a data collection method in which questions are asked based on a predefined thematic framework. However, the order and wording of the questions are flexible and not rigid (George, 2023). Semi-structured interviews facilitate open-ended discussions, resulting in diverse insights and perspectives. Their inherent flexibility enables a thorough examination of the topic, emphasizing the participants' viewpoints and experiences. The primary objective of semi-structured interviews is to comprehend participants' feelings and attitudes towards a particular subject or issue, rather than merely gathering data or information. Furthermore, due to their allowance for open discourse and exploratory questioning, these interviews can effectively yield novel insights and uncover new phenomena related to complex social issues (Nicole & Omolola, 2021)

In this thesis, I used semi-structured interviews due to their ability to elicit rich, detailed information and their flexibility. This method allowed me to create a relaxed atmosphere in which participants could respond openly during the interviews. Because my research included children, it was critical to create a comfortable environment in which they could fully express their emotions and personal experiences.

Throughout the interviews, I used open-ended questions to allow the child participants to articulate their responses freely and naturally. They demonstrated an adept ability to communicate their experiences through detailed and precise responses. During the question

formulation phase, it was critical for me to conduct an extensive literature review to determine the most relevant and effective questions tailored to the objectives of this thesis. The study focused on people under the age of 18, with the goal of understanding the implications of the informal labor market for refugee children living in Istanbul. Eight children, evenly split between genders, were purposefully chosen from various locations throughout Istanbul, representing a range of age cohorts. Despite the fact that all of the children worked in informal settings, each had a unique experience, encountering both shared and individualized emotional and logistical challenges.

Participants were informed at the beginning of each interview session that the proceedings would be recorded for auditory documentation. This arrangement allowed me, as the researcher, to engage with participants without having to transcribe notes. Using this methodology, I attempted to conduct the interviews at locations preferred by the participants, creating an environment conducive to their comfort and unrestricted expression.

Furthermore, prior to the start of recording, participants were given a thorough explanation of the research objectives, which was followed by the solicitation of their informed consent. I emphasized the ethical imperatives, which included the confidential nature of the interviews and their voluntary participation, ensuring their complete comfort and confidentiality.

Ultimately, this study took a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews to investigate participants' complex experiences and perspectives, with a particular emphasis on refugee children navigating Istanbul's informal labor sector. The study used semi-structured interviews to facilitate open-ended dialogues, highlighting participants' voices and lived experiences, resulting in comprehensive and nuanced data collection. The creation of a supportive and conducive environment, specifically tailored to the needs of child participants, was central to the research methodology, allowing for unrestricted expression during the interviews. The research sought to gain insights into the particular obstacles and consequences of informal labor for refugee children in Istanbul by meticulously designing questions and actively engaging with participants. Ethical principles, such as obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality, emphasized the ethical integrity of the research project throughout.

4.2 SOCIOECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE ON CHILD LABOR

This section examines the socioeconomic factors that influence the prevalence of child labour. It looks into how economic deprivation, poverty, and a lack of access to education contribute to situations in which child labor is viewed as a necessary means of survival. Following the Syrian war, Istanbul saw the emergence of conditions that facilitated the employment of Syrian children in the informal economy. These families faced significant socioeconomic challenges, which resulted in a noticeable increase in child labor.

Child labor is a complex issue influenced by a variety of factors, including socioeconomic inequalities and limited access to education. These factors not only increase the prevalence of child labor, but also blur the lines that define it, complicating efforts to address the issue effectively.

4.2.1 Poverty and Child Labor

Child labor and poverty are two interconnected issues that frequently occur together. Despite being distinct phenomena, they are closely related and have a significant impact on one another.

Poverty has a significant impact on parental decisions regarding child labor. In low-income households, children frequently play critical roles in meeting basic needs and ensuring familial sustenance through labor earnings. Financially constrained parents' inability to use their children's future earning potential as collateral may force them to prioritize child labor over educational pursuits, impeding the child's overall development (Samonova, 2014).

Child labor is frequently used as a coping mechanism in impoverished communities, perpetuating a cycle of poverty by denying children access to education and opportunities for socioeconomic advancement. Poverty exposes children to exploitation in the labor market, where they are forced to work in hazardous or exploitative conditions in order to relieve financial stress. Poverty-related lack of educational access causes children to enter the labor force too early, as families prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term educational investments (Lindahl & Krueger, 2000).

For Syrian refugee parents living in Istanbul, particularly those experiencing economic volatility and displacement, their inability to capitalize on their children's future earning potential through financial mechanisms such as borrowing, or investment may increase their reliance on child labor as an immediate source of income. As a result, children are forced to

forego educational opportunities in order to support their family's economic stability, putting their long-term development prospects at risk.

Despite concerted efforts by local and international stakeholders to address child labor concerns, it remains prevalent in Istanbul's Syrian refugee community. This persistence is especially noticeable among households with incomes below a certain threshold, where poverty plays a significant role in perpetuating the cycle of child labor.

Furthermore, the precarious economic circumstances that Syrian refugee families face frequently compel both children and parents to engage in wage labor, exacerbating the prevalence of child labor practices among this vulnerable population. Additionally, systemic barriers to education and social protection exacerbate the difficulties faced by Syrian refugee children in Istanbul, impeding efforts to break the cycle of poverty-induced child labor.

In conclusion, the complicated relationship between child labor and poverty emphasizes the critical need for comprehensive interventions that address both phenomena simultaneously. Poverty has a significant impact on parental decision-making regarding child labor, and child labor exacerbates poverty by limiting children's access to education and socioeconomic advancement. This dynamic interaction is especially evident among Syrian refugee households in Istanbul, where economic insecurity and displacement increase reliance on child labor as an immediate source of income.

Despite efforts by local and international stakeholders, child labor continues to exist among this vulnerable demographic, emphasizing the multifaceted challenges that must be addressed in order to break the cycle of poverty-induced child labor. Effective strategies necessitate a comprehensive approach that addresses systemic barriers to education and social protection while also promoting sustainable economic opportunities for families.

4.2.2 Social Norms and Child Labor

This section delves into the diverse relationship between social norms and child labor, emphasizing the significant impact of cultural, societal, and familial expectations on the prevalence and acceptance of child labor. It seeks to examine how social norms can either reinforce or challenge the practice of child labor.

According to Epstein and Herz, social norms have a significant impact on parental decisions about child labor, with parents frequently replicating behaviors and choices observed in their own childhood. Those who have experienced child labor are more likely to accept it and may

perpetuate the cycle by sending their children to work, demonstrating the practice's intergenerational transmission.

In societies where child labor is common and normalized, parents may find it difficult to break away from this norm because it is deeply embedded in the social fabric and regarded as standard practice. The acceptance of child labor within specific social or ethnic groups perpetuates its existence and poses significant challenges to efforts to eradicate this harmful practice (Epstein & Herz, 2022).

Abdullah et al discovered that social norms such as gender, informal apprenticeships, succession, and obedience have a significant influence on child labor within families. These norms frequently state that involving children in work at a young age instills values like hard work and resilience, thereby preparing them for the future. Certain occupations, such as cocoa farming and fishing, are frequently perceived by parents as family traditions that should be passed down to future generations, reinforcing acceptance of child labor.

Gender norms play an important role, with boys typically engaged in income-generating activities and girls more involved in domestic chores, which reflect societal expectations. As a result, children frequently view child labor as necessary for developing resilience and becoming diligent workers, which aligns with societal values but may ignore the negative effects on their well-being (Abdullah, Huynh, Emery, & Jordan, 2022).

In Syrian society, it is customary for children to contribute to the family income from an early age. This contribution usually entails assisting in family-owned businesses or working in informal jobs alongside their parents. This type of involvement is thought to help children develop a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility. The economic necessity of this practice is especially clear in larger families, where children's labor significantly reduces the financial burden on parents (Evason, 2016). Because of this, and the impact of the Syrian crisis, families who were displaced to Istanbul, Türkiye, did not face significant issues with child labor.

In the end, social norms have a significant impact on the prevalence and acceptance of child labor across societies. The intergenerational transmission of these norms, as highlighted by Epstein and Herz, highlights the difficulty of breaking the cycle of child labor, especially in communities where it is deeply ingrained. Abdullah et al.'s findings show how gender and family traditions reinforce this practice, which is often disguised as "preparing children for the future." In the context of Syrian families, displacement as a result of the Syrian crisis has

exacerbated the economic necessity and cultural acceptance of child labor, as evidenced by their move to Istanbul. These dynamics imply that addressing child labor necessitates not only economic interventions, but also a thorough understanding and challenge of the social norms that perpetuate it.

4.3 FIELD WORK: RESEARCH INTERVIEW

As it has been stated previously, this study uses a qualitative research approach to thoroughly investigate the impact of the informal labor market on Syrian refugee children living in Istanbul. At the heart of this research are field studies and interviews with Syrian minors who are actively working in the city. By engaging in direct dialogue with these children, the study hopes to capture their lived experiences, challenges, and future goals. These interviews shed light on the socioeconomic conditions that these young refugees face, providing a thorough understanding of how informal labor affects their education, social integration, and overall well-being. This study, which is based on firsthand accounts from those directly affected, aims to shed light on the human aspects of child labor and guide the development of targeted interventions to address this critical issue.

4.3.1 In-Depth Interviews with Syrian Children: Focus on Boys

In an initial interview with a Syrian child who moved to Türkiye at the start of the Syrian conflict, it was revealed that the parents entered Türkiye legally with passports, but the children were smuggled across rivers. One of the respondents has stated that he was five and a half years old when he and his siblings escaped. When asked if he experienced fear and anxiety during this time, he replied, “It wasn't more terrifying than the explosions, martyrs, and remains of children we witnessed in Syria”. The respondent has underlined that, when they arrived in Türkiye, the family settled in Hatay. Unfortunately, following the 2023 earthquake, they were forced to relocate to Istanbul. Initially, he received in-person education in Hatay, but after moving to Istanbul, he chose remote education due to the city's large size, unfamiliarity with schools and routes, and the family's unstable situation.

The respondent is currently seventeen years old and works in a mobile device shop in the Fatih neighborhood while continuing his studies. He lives near Istanbul International Airport and commutes from home to work for about two and a half hours each day, totaling about five hours spent on transportation. He has two older sisters as well as two younger brothers. He and his father are the only ones who work to support their family. When asked why other

family members do not work, he explained that, according to Syrian family traditions, it is strictly forbidden for girls to work, and as the eldest male sibling, he assumed the responsibility of providing for the family alongside his father. In his own words “As a traditional Syrian family, we adhere to the cultural norm of not permitting girls to join the workforce as long as there is a male sibling available to work alongside the father”.

After explaining his educational situation, he was asked how he manages work and study, and whether he has any difficulties doing so. Unfortunately, the distance between his work and home makes it difficult for him to manage his time between work and study. He stated that when deciding between work and study, he prioritizes work. He went on to say that he does not follow his lessons throughout the week because he believes they are unnecessary. He only needs to know the exam dates so he can prepare a week ahead. When asked how he prepares for exams, whether he requests leave, and whether his employer cooperates, he stated that as the sole employee, it is difficult to grant him leave during exam season. As a result, he feels compelled to bring his study materials to work. When the shop is empty, he studies; when a customer walks in, he attends to them before returning to his studies. He does not value education because he already works and earns enough money to meet his needs. He's only continuing his education to get a certificate. He also stated that he is engaged and is prioritizing work to meet the demands of marriage.

Regarding his social and psychological state, he stated that the earthquake had a significant negative impact on him and that it took him about five months to recover. He explained that about an hour before the earthquake, he was on the phone with a friend, and their conversation ended in an argument. Half an hour later, the earthquake struck, and he immediately called his friend to check on him, but he did not answer. He then called other family members and received no response.

After moving his family to an open area away from buildings, he went to his friend's house and met his friend's father. He repeatedly inquired about his friend's well-being and whereabouts, and after several inquiries, his friend's father finally informed him that his friend had passed away. After moving to Istanbul and the family's resettlement, he began to understand what had happened and began to suffer from anxiety, insomnia, and excessive thinking throughout the day. He went on to say that it was extremely difficult for him to overcome his sadness because of the numerous pressures on him, such as work and school responsibilities, which left him with no time to think about himself. He shared his feelings

as such: “After a period of time in Turkey, I became aware of the numerous challenges I had faced. Overcoming these difficulties was not easy. I experienced excessive overthinking for several months, which led to significant sleep disturbances. Consequently, this added an extra burden to my academic and professional responsibilities”.

In the second interview, the second respondent his experiences since arriving in Türkiye as a five-year-old in 2015. He is now fifteen and lives in the Küçükçekmece area. He currently works in a confectionery shop in Istanbul's Florya district to support his family, which consists of his mother, father, and two sisters. He must repeat the current school year due to his inability to balance work and study. His school hours are from 8 a.m. to noon, and his work hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. When asked how he manages to attend school given his work schedule, he explained that school was not his top priority, and he would only request time off from work on exam days or to catch up on missed lessons from his classmates. In his own words “I cannot prioritize going to school at this time because my work schedule coincides with school hours. I can only request time off from work before the exam period”.

He must repeat the current school year due to his inability to balance work and study. His school hours are from 8 a.m. to noon, and his work hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. When asked how he manages to attend school given his work schedule, he explained that school was not his top priority, and he would only request time off from work on exam days or to catch up on missed lessons from his classmates.

Throughout the interview he also mentioned about his psychological state, noting that the family's unstable situation causes constant tension in the home. At the start of each month, the family calculates their necessary expenses for rent, food, and other necessities, which contributes to his psychological instability and lack of security during this period of time. The interview ended with a poignant statement from him: “I have no idea what safety and comfort feel like. I left Syria at the age of five and am now fifteen years old. All I know is that these years have been filled with fear, and I'm not sure how I'll spend the rest of my life with my family without suffering”.

In the third interview, a twelve-year-old respondent stated that they arrived in Türkiye two years ago, in 2022, having fled Syria alone with a group of young men using illegal means.

His family is still in Syria, but his older brother, who moved to Türkiye ten years ago, and his maternal grandparents, who also live in Türkiye, provide his current living arrangements. The child faced numerous difficulties during his escape due to the illegality of the journey. As a result, he lacks a temporary protection card and is unable to pursue educational opportunities. He is currently working at a men's barbershop in the Sultanbeyli district due to Syria's severe economic downturn, which has left his parents unemployed. He and his brother are responsible for supporting his parents in Syria as well as his maternal grandparents in Türkiye.

The child faces significant difficulties at work because he is the youngest employee in the establishment. When asked to elaborate on his working conditions, given that he does not attend school and is entirely engaged in work, he provided the following information:

His workday begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 7 p.m. His employer has a harsh demeanor and allows only one hour of rest per day. He also stated that he receives constant instructions from his coworkers, which is indicative of exploitative practices due to his age. His responsibilities include cleaning the floor before and after each customer, making tea and coffee for customers, and getting them ready for their haircut.

Furthermore, the child suffers from a profound sense of familial disconnection, as he is geographically separated from his parents and unable to communicate with them on a regular basis due to unreliable internet access in Syria. Furthermore, he does not own a mobile phone because his older brother believes it is inappropriate for a child to have one before the age of eighteen. This viewpoint reflects a broader societal view within the Syrian community, in which child labor is regarded as a duty rather than a danger to the child. The brother believes it is normal for a twelve-year-old to work more than eight hours per day and be denied a mobile phone.

During the discussion, when asked how his family ensures his safe arrival at work and maintains communication for reassurance, he expressed sadness, saying, "I am very sad." My brother treats me harshly because he believes it is for my own good. He believes that a phone wastes time and instills incorrect ideas in my mind, but I simply want to entertain myself by playing electronic games." He also stated that his brother, a friend of his employer, calls the employer an hour after he leaves home to confirm his arrival at work, and that the brother comes to accompany him home in the evening.

In the fourth interview, I spoke with a fourteen-year-old boy who had been in school until February 2023. The boy lost both of his parents in the Hatay earthquake, and his family fled to Türkiye in 2012, just as the conflict began. Following the earthquake, the boy moved to Istanbul with his uncle and his family.

The boy currently works at a supermarket in Istanbul's Cumhuriyet Mahallesi neighborhood. Since arriving in Istanbul, he has made the firm decision not to return to school. He is in charge of opening the supermarket every day at 10 a.m. and working as a cashier until the owner arrives, at which point he takes over delivery duties. His shift lasts until the evening, after which he returns home.

The boy's psychological state is a standout feature of his story. During the interview, when discussing his decision to skip school in favor of work, it was clear that his viewpoint was unusually mature for a fourteen-year-old. The boy stated, "I do not see a future for myself. Why should I study? It will add nothing to my life. I lost both my parents. Who do I study for? Who will I succeed and achieve good grades for? He also revealed that he had considered suicide several times, perceiving his life as meaningless. He explained, "I still can't get over the death of my parents. I hear my mother's voice and see her in my dreams every day."

As previously stated, the respondent now lives with his uncle in the Cumhuriyet Mahallesi area. While discussing his education, he mentioned that his uncle had repeatedly tried to persuade him to enroll in school and continue his education. However, each discussion ended in an argument, prompting his uncle to eventually accept his decision. The boy emphasized that he does not believe formal education is necessary because it will not benefit his current situation. He stated that he only needs money to cover his personal expenses and does not request an allowance from his uncle. Rather than thinking over the importance of education and its potential to open up new employment opportunities, he countered that he could find numerous freelance jobs without a diploma. Furthermore, his work environment, which is predominantly made up of young people, has had a significant impact on his outlook. When discussing the importance and priority of work in one's life, he used examples from his supermarket colleagues who do not have diplomas.

This interview differed significantly from the others. This boy's tragedy is shared by many other children who have lost their parents and must face life's challenges on their own. As a result, the conversation focused primarily on his psychological state. He independently

elaborated on his feelings, expressing a strong desire for someone to listen to his thoughts and ideas. He also expressed his dislike for socializing, preferring solitude in his room over dining with his uncle and family.

4.3.2 In-Depth Interviews with Syrian Children: Focus on Girls

In an initial interview with a sixteen-year-old respondent who sought refuge in Türkiye with her family in 2014, it was revealed that due to the war and disruptions in her education, she is academically behind her peers under normal circumstances. Nonetheless, she was determined to complete her education to the best of her ability, attending evening classes while working in the mornings at a sewing factory in Zeytinburnu. During the interview, she explained that she needed to work alongside her brothers because her father is disabled and unable to work due to health issues. Despite her brothers' employment, the family's income is insufficient, so she must work to help alleviate the financial burden.

She stated that working as a girl is typically unacceptable in Syrian society, particularly in her family. The traditions she was raised with dictate that a girl is only educated until a certain age, and by the age of eighteen, she is expected to prioritize marriage over furthering her education. However, due to her family's unstable financial situation and the need to secure rent and basic necessities, her family was forced to allow her to work, albeit under certain conditions, the most significant of which was that her work environment was entirely female with no male interaction.

The respondent stated that as a child, she is profoundly affected by the loss of a social life because she does not have friends with whom to engage in social activities. She expressed that she sometimes feels burdened with responsibilities that force her to act older than her actual age, and her thinking does not align with that of children. Furthermore, due to her work commitments, she misses out on the familial bond and warmth that every child deserves, as her family does not have enough time to gather and communicate effectively.

In the second interview, seventeen-year-old girl living in Istanbul's Yenibosna neighborhood. She and her family fled to Türkiye in late 2017, just as the war began. Her family sought refuge in Türkiye due to the increasingly deplorable living conditions in Syria. She is the only daughter in her family, with a brother two years younger.

Her mother was injured during the war, resulting in the amputation of her right hand. Her father works in the construction industry, while her brother works in a factory. Given her mother's condition, the girl is required to do household chores in the morning, including

preparing lunch for her family, before heading to work at 1 PM. She works in the kitchen of a café close to her home, washing dishes, cleaning vegetables, and preparing customer orders.

The respondent stated that she was one of Aleppo's top students. When her family arrived in Türkiye and was granted temporary protection, she and her father immediately enrolled her in school to further her education. However, she struggled to balance her responsibilities at work, school, and home. She explained that she couldn't give up her job or leave her mother to handle the household chores alone. She told her teachers about her situation, and they were understanding and let her take exams without having to attend school.

She currently divides her day into three parts: she wakes up early to work until 11 a.m., then prepares to work from 1 p.m. to 10 p.m., and finally begins studying when she returns home. She mentioned having initial difficulties, but before she stopped going to school regularly, she had supportive friends who shared their class notes with her, which helped her studies to some extent.

She admitted that her academic performance and grades have dropped from previous levels due to the pressures she faces, making her feel inadequate in her studies. She wishes she could devote more time to studying, but she admits, "I feel like my time is not my own, as if the day is not 24 hours." She acknowledged the difficulty of managing multiple responsibilities at her age. Observing her peers, she is saddened to see them attending school while she is working. Nonetheless, she refrains from expressing this to her family, acknowledging their difficult circumstances and the collaborative effort to contribute in any way possible to the family's resilience.

During our conversation, she mentioned that she struggles with concentration throughout the day. However, she understands, despite her young age, finishing her education is critical. She understands that unless she completes her education, she will be unable to secure higher-paying job opportunities to support her family. We ended our conversation with her by expressing how, despite these pressures, she works every day to bring her family together to relieve stress and boost morale.

In the third interview, a fourteen-year-old respondent from the Yusufpaşa neighborhood of Istanbul. She and her mother sought asylum two years ago after her brother was martyred during the Syrian conflict; she had previously lost her father. As a result, their sources of income were severed, and Syria became a repository of painful memories for them. They

crossed the Turkish border irregularly, so they do not have temporary protection status today. The respondent stated that she avoids leaving her neighborhood and interacting with others to avoid potential complications and deportation. She works two jobs at the same time: one cleaning houses with her mother and the other at a sewing workshop in Aksaray.

Her undocumented status forces her to work in the informal sector, a situation that also affects her mother. Due to language barriers and her fear of the police, she does not use her real name when cleaning houses and only works in the homes of Syrians in her neighborhood. When asked about her communication at the sewing workshop, she explained that she knows a Syrian girl who lives in the same building and works there. This girl sought asylum in Türkiye eight years ago and is now fluent in Turkish, allowing her to communicate with her employer.

Her hours at the workshop are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., with a one-hour lunch break. Because the house cleaning job is irregular, she leaves the workshop on occasion to accompany her mother. The girl added that because she comes from a conservative family, her mother does not go to work without her. After her father and brother died in Syria, they suffered as a result of the lack of a male figure in the home. When asked to elaborate on the difficulties faced because of the lack of a man in the house, she mentioned frequent harassment by men in their Syrian neighborhood, which limited their ability to leave the house except for essential needs. This was one of the driving forces behind their decision to seek refuge in Türkiye.

As a result, her mother does not allow her to go out alone, and she, in turn, cannot let her mother go alone to the houses they clean. They have developed a mutual sense of fear. When she goes to the sewing workshop, her friend's mother, who is also a friend of her own mother, accompanies her, providing the necessary reassurance for her mother.

The girl is supposed to be in school, but due to her circumstances, she is unable to enroll. She went on to explain that her mother is too afraid of deportation to apply for temporary protection cards. Regarding her work, she mentioned lower back pain and a deterioration in her vision, which makes it difficult for her to see distant objects clearly. She continued, "Without legal status to protect us, my mother and I cannot live comfortably." She can't even get a medical appointment, and they don't have the money to see a private doctor.

She concluded by discussing her social situation, stating that she is content in the company of a friend who lives in the same building. She leaves the house with extreme caution, only going to a nearby supermarket or to her friend's apartment, even though her friend is several

years her senior. She summed up her situation by saying, "We do not have a life; we just thank God that we are alive every day."

The final interview was with a fifteen-year-old respondent who fled to Türkiye with her parents and two sisters six years ago. Her two sisters have since married in Türkiye, leaving her to live with her parents in Istanbul's Esenyurt neighborhood.

The respondent stated that she goes to school in the morning and returns home around 1 PM to eat lunch. She goes to work at 4 p.m. and stays until 10 p.m. She works at a Syrian restaurant in the Beylikdüzü area. Given the informal nature of her job, she asked for a position in the cleaning department to avoid drawing attention during inspections.

Despite the small size of her family, the respondent is forced to work due to her mother's illness. Her mother suffers from kidney failure, necessitating a special diet and medical supplies. Furthermore, even though they live in a basement apartment, the rent in their neighborhood is prohibitively expensive for their financial situation. Her father works in a bakery, which makes it difficult to rely solely on his income. During our conversation, her mother stated, "I feel guilty because my daughter has to work at such a young age. Her father and I bear the burden of not allowing her to enjoy her childhood." The mother has also mentioned that she hears her daughter cough every night because of the chemicals she inhaled while cleaning.

When asked about the impact of her work in her health, the respondent explained that she has shortness of breath and a cough, which worsens at night. I asked if she takes the necessary precautions while working, such as wearing a mask. She responded that she does not wear a mask and is only provided with gloves. She went on to say that her work has an impact on her both physically and mentally.

The respondent also has trouble managing her time and effort while studying. She stated that attending school every day is insufficient. Attending classes requires her to read the material and complete her assignments. She often must get up two hours before school to finish her homework. It is difficult for her to take leave for all exam days because her employer may fire her. She cannot risk requesting too many days off because she secured this job with difficulty to accommodate her school schedule. When asked about her social life, the respondent has reiterated that she spends her Sunday off with her parents at a park or at the restaurant where she works, where she receives a discount. Since her mother's health

prevents them from walking long distances, she prefers to plan outings that are appropriate for her mother.



5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The ongoing conflict in Syria has forced many families to flee and seek refuge in neighboring countries. Children are among the most vulnerable groups affected by displacement, as they face a variety of challenges in their new communities. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence child labor among Syrian refugee children in Istanbul. By examining the specific challenges and outcomes that these children face, this study hopes to shed light on the specific economic, social, and psychological difficulties they face, their coping mechanisms, and the broader implications that drive their participation in the informal labor market.

As a result, the core of this study revolves around the following research questions: What impact does participate in the informal labor market have on the lives of Syrian refugee children in Istanbul? How do sociopolitical factors shape the experiences of these refugee children in Istanbul? Furthermore, how does informal labor affect these children's educational opportunities and overall social integration?

In-depth interviews have revealed that Syrian refugee children frequently struggle to balance work and education. Even though education is a basic right, many children must choose to work over attend school to support their families. Economic insecurity in refugee households' forces children to enter the labor market, owing to factors such as reduced family income and the high cost of living in Istanbul.

This study addresses issues that have not been thoroughly explored in previous research, particularly the long-term impacts on children's lives. Many children are compelled to either leave school or prioritize work over education to support their families, despite education being a fundamental right. This necessity arises from the need to earn money to cover basic living expenses. When children attempt to balance work and education, a variety of negative consequences ensue. The children interviewed reported that managing these responsibilities is extremely challenging. Employment diminishes their ability to focus on their studies and frequently prevents them from attending school regularly, as child labor typically overlaps with school hours. Due to a lack of adequate time, they are also unprepared for exams, which has a negative impact on their grades and frequently forces them to repeat the academic year. Irregular school attendance is associated with poor academic performance, which contributes

to school dropout. This has a direct impact on their academic performance and an indirect impact on their future job prospects. This was evidenced by an interview with a male respondent who stated, "The distance between my workplace and home makes it challenging to balance and prioritize my studies." Another child noted, "Prioritizing work over studying has forced me to repeat the school year because I failed my subjects, as I couldn't allocate sufficient time for my studies." Additionally, a female respondent confirmed, "Unfortunately, my academic performance has declined compared to previous years due to the pressures of working."

Moreover, a concerning belief among working children, which has not been extensively researched, is that education is useless if you can make money without it. This idea, backed up by their work experiences, diminishes the importance of education in their lives. During an interview conducted in the Cumhuriyet Mahallesi area with a child who lost his parents in the Hatay earthquake and subsequently relocated to Istanbul, the child expressed, "From my perspective, education holds no significance. As long as I can earn money by working at the supermarket and meet my basic needs, education is not essential."

Furthermore, child labor prevents children from engaging in social and recreational activities that are necessary for a healthy childhood. They miss out on school events and playtime, which are critical for their growth. The constant pressure on children, combined with the responsibility of financially supporting their families, causes them to neglect the social lives they deserve. During my interviews with children, I discovered that due to their young age, the majority of them grew up without engaging in any recreational activities. They were raised in an environment that valued responsibility and contributing to their families' needs, which was not adequately addressed in previous studies. Also, they lack family time, which is one of the most important sources of emotional support that children derive from their families to develop their personality and sense of security, and unfortunately, this loss will affect their interactions with their families in the future. It is also critical to consider how children who have lost their parents can compensate for this loss.

The interviews confirmed that the children all have a lack of social life, which hinders their ability to participate in school activities and limits their time socializing with friends outside of school hours. According to one interview with a young girl, her daily schedule is so busy that she doesn't have time to form friendships for shared activities or recreational outings. Furthermore, family time is particularly scarce in these households. A child emphasized this

point by saying, "As a family, we lack the familial time that is meant to provide warmth and emotional support". This scenario is applicable to children whose parents are still alive. The situation is even more desperate for children who have lost their parents. One such child stated that after his parents died, he saw his life as meaningless and had suicidal thoughts on occasion.

Also, I discovered that Syrian society practices gender discrimination against children. Girls are subject to entirely different standards and regulations than boys. Despite the hardships of life, they face because of their employment, they are surrounded by customs and traditions that restrict their freedom. Girls in this society are considered isolated from male-dominated environments. This, in my opinion, represents an additional consequence that has not been addressed before. Many of the girls I interviewed agreed that their families would normally set a specific age for them to complete their education. This is a long-standing Syrian family tradition. When these families began allowing girls to work, it was only out of necessity and with numerous restrictions. This makes it more difficult for girls to mature in future relationships. When they were given the opportunity to work, they were assigned to female-only environments, and if there was a workplace with men, they were assigned to sections with no direct contact with men.

Boys, on the other hand, are raised from a young age with the understanding that, as males, they must shoulder the responsibility of working alongside the family's head. As a result, the "boy" matures prematurely, though this is not perceived as a problem in their society. When conversing with them as a "child," one does not notice childlike thinking; rather, their responses are conscious and fully aware that, as males in the family, they are expected to earn money.

Consequently, it is probable that boys will be directed towards physically demanding roles without specific regulations or limitations, whereas girls are more inclined to work in households or garment factories, indicating the imposition of societal norms on females within Syrian communities.

For instance, when I inquired whether his sisters also contributed to the family's income, one boy responded, "As the male sibling in the family, it is my duty to shoulder this responsibility along with my father. Our family also opposes the idea of girls working." Furthermore, one girl noted that in Syrian society, there are well-established norms for Syrian girls. Typically, a girl continues her education up to a certain age, after which she is married and begins her

role as a homemaker. However, due to the family's dire financial circumstances, her parents felt compelled to allow her to work, provided that the work environment was exclusively female.

Syrian refugee children in Istanbul engage in informal work not only because of their young age, which prevents them from entering the formal labor market, but also due to their irregular documentation. More specifically, these children do not have temporary protection cards, which help them move around and give them certain rights. The Turkish government's strict surveillance of refugees with irregular documentation causes constant and ongoing anxiety in the children while they work. The child, who is entitled to live in peace as a natural right, cannot exercise this right. This suggests that most children who sought refuge at a young age or were born in the host country with illegal documentation do not understand the concept of safety. As a result, the lack of security will have a long-term impact on the child's inner peace and self-confidence. This is also one of the consequences of the informal labor market, which has been discussed from a legal standpoint in some research, but its impact on the child's psychological well-being has received insufficient attention.

This challenge was articulated by a young girl who, along with her mother, sought refuge in Turkey through irregular means, resulting in their lack of legal documentation. Consequently, they are unable to move freely or engage in the formal labor market. The girl remarked during the interview, "Without legal protection, my mother and I cannot live comfortably." Similarly, another child, who fled alone to join his brother without his parents, faces considerable difficulties. He noted in the interview that he is unable to access basic rights, such as enrolling in school, due to the absence of legal documentation. As a result, he is compelled to participate in the informal labor market.

Future research should aim to conduct a thorough investigation into the long-term effects of child labor on these children's lives, with a focus on understanding the psychological and social consequences of their work experiences. Policy implications include putting in place measures to ensure children's regular school attendance as well as safe and legal working conditions. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to establish strong social support systems to help children balance their work responsibilities and educational pursuits, thereby ensuring their overall well-being.

The Syrian crisis should serve as a lesson for future crises, emphasizing the importance of developing new economic support mechanisms for refugee families in host countries. When

a family's financial stability is relatively assured, the need for children to work decreases. Awareness programs aimed at parents of refugee children should also be implemented to help them understand the risks associated with child labor in general, as well as the unique challenges of informal work. Furthermore, governmental and non-governmental organizations should work together to create a cohesive and comprehensive approach to combating child labor.



6. CONCLUSION

This thesis has undertaken a comprehensive exploration of the intricate issue of Syrian refugee children participating in the informal labor market in Istanbul. The primary objective was to understand how their involvement in this labor market impacts their lives, considering various social, political, economic, and psychological factors. The findings reveal significant exploitation faced by these children, which is exacerbated by early work initiation, limited educational opportunities, and long working hours.

The study's findings highlight several key challenges, particularly socio-economic ones. The precarious economic situation of Syrian refugee families forces children into the workforce. Financial instability necessitates reliance on children's labor for the family's survival and to meet basic needs. This creates a cycle of poverty where immediate financial needs take precedence over long-term educational investments. As a result, children are deprived of education, which is crucial for their cognitive development and future economic prospects. These socio-economic challenges are further compounded by the limited access of adult refugees to stable employment in the formal sector, increasing the burden on children to engage in the informal sector. The informal labor market provides minimal wages, often below the subsistence level, perpetuating a state of economic vulnerability and hardship for refugee families.

And this study underscores that the pronounced educational exclusion experienced by child laborers results in irregular school attendance, thereby engendering substantial disparities in learning and developmental outcomes. Furthermore, their lack of access to formal education constrains their educational prospects, confining them to low-skilled, low-wage employment opportunities. This situation not only impedes their personal development but also restricts their social and economic mobility within the refugee community.

Moreover, educational deprivation diminishes children's integration and social engagement, intensifying their marginalization and sense of exclusion from mainstream society. Such isolation complicates their aspirations for a more promising future.

The psychological impact on child laborers, as evidenced by this study, is profound and multifaceted. Many of these children have endured significant hardships due to the Syrian conflict and their involvement in labor activities unsuitable for their age, which has adversely affected their mental health. This has manifested in symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. Compounding these challenges is the inadequate provision of mental health services tailored to meet the specific needs of refugee children. The lack of support systems exacerbates their emotional and psychological distress, leaving enduring scars on their mental well-being.

On other hand, this study sheds light on significant legal and social impediments that have hindered refugee children from accessing fundamental rights and protections. Many lack requisite documentation, limiting their mobility and access to formal education. Stringent governmental oversight of undocumented refugees heightens children's anxieties and insecurities, complicating their daily lives.

Furthermore, legal obstacles obstruct their access to essential healthcare and social services vital for refugee children's well-being. Addressing the pervasive issue of child labor among Syrian refugee children necessitates a comprehensive approach. For example, developing robust economic support mechanisms for refugee families is paramount. Providing financial aid and employment opportunities for parents can mitigate the necessity for child labor by enhancing family financial stability, thereby reducing economic pressures on children. Moreover, establishing vocational training and job placement programs for adults is critical. These initiatives enable adults to secure stable, adequately remunerated employment, alleviating burdens on children and enabling them to prioritize their education and personal growth.

Raising awareness about the risks associated with child labor and the formidable challenges faced by refugee children is of paramount importance. It is essential to develop targeted educational programs aimed at parents and communities to shift societal norms and diminish the acceptance of child labor. Implementing regulations that permit boys to engage in work while restricting girls to certain tasks and prioritizing early marriage should also be emphasized. These initiatives must underscore the significance of education and its future dividends for children.

Furthermore, streamlining the process of obtaining legal documentation specifically for children is imperative to ensure their access to fundamental rights, including education and healthcare. Equally critical is strengthening oversight of the informal sector to safeguard children from exploitation and ensure access to justice. Establishing comprehensive psychological and social support systems for working children is equally crucial. This entails balancing their work commitments with educational responsibilities and addressing cumulative traumas and pressures through tailored support mechanisms. Family support programs and the cultivation of a nurturing family environment should complement these efforts to provide essential care for children. Ultimately, addressing these multifaceted challenges will foster a resilient and educated generation with aspirations for a brighter future and enhanced educational prospects. This approach will empower the next generation to rebuild their communities and restore stability, reinforcing their resilience and capacity to confront future adversities.

The protracted Syrian crisis and its aftermath offer profound lessons and insights for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders on managing similar crises in the future. Adopting strategies that tackle the root causes of child labor globally while promoting sustainable economic opportunities for families is paramount. The plight of Syrian refugee children in Istanbul serves as a poignant reminder of youth resilience and our collective duty to nurture and safeguard them.

Finally, to address the issue of child labor among Syrian refugees, it is imperative to enhance and enforce legal frameworks to protect these children from exploitation. These laws should align with international standards established by the International Labour Organization (ILO). There should be a systematic increase in monitoring and inspection of workplaces, particularly those known to employ children. Establishing a dedicated task force to oversee the work activities of refugee children and ensure prompt action against any violations is recommended.

In terms of education, a critical aspect for this age group, it is necessary to expand educational programs specifically tailored for Syrian refugee children. These programs should be inclusive and designed to accommodate children who have missed several years of schooling. Financial incentives, such as grants, subsidies, and conditional cash transfers, should be provided to families to encourage school attendance over child labor.

Moreover, it is essential to implement effective community awareness campaigns that highlight the detrimental effects of child labor and the importance of education for the children's future. Creating safe spaces for children that offer educational and recreational activities is also recommended.



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