

Family, Childhood, and Child Labor: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Child Labor in Turkey

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Abstract

Child labor continues to exist as a problem specific to childhood worldwide. Children, considered disadvantaged groups, today face a wide range of risks. While sensitivity to child protection has increased, particularly after World War II, it is not yet at the desired level. States and international organizations continue their efforts to protect children. While these efforts have been effective to some extent, they have not met expectations, particularly in terms of reducing child labor. In this respect, the importance of sociological factors in reducing child labor comes to the fore. Sociology recommends examining childhood within the framework of social, cultural, economic, familial, and many other variables. When considered from this perspective, considering child labor within the framework of socioeconomic causes will facilitate understanding of the issue. The focus of this study is the family and the child. From birth, the child grows up within the family, and their identity is shaped by the values of that society. The society in which the child lives and the family's perspective on the child have a shaping effect on all processes related to the child, especially child labor. This study conducted a socioeconomic analysis of child labor in Turkey, focusing on various social variables, particularly the family. A qualitative method was used in the study, and the dataset was developed using data from ILO, UNICEF, and TÜİK. Family, education, migration, economic, and regional variables were found to be influential in the emergence, perception, and resolution of child labor in Turkey.

Key words: Family, Child, Child Labor, Türkiye

JEL Code: J12, J13

1. Introduction

From the past to the present, children and childhood in the categorical sense have undergone changes in many aspects. In parallel with the transformation of the

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elements that constitute society during the process of social change, the perspective on children and childhood has taken on different forms, both locally and globally. Today, children continue to constitute a topic of debate in diverse areas such as population, family, labor, crime, migration, education, consumption, and politics. Children, considered a sociologically disadvantaged group, face various risks from various perspectives. Chief among these risks is child labor. While the emotional value of children in today's world has increased and the perspective on childhood has changed positively, child labor continues to be a strong threat to children. In all societies, children grow up within the family. The family is one of the most important social institutions that plays a role in the socialization process of children. In this context, the appearance of child labor in a society is closely related to that society's family structure and perspective on childhood.

There is a close relationship between family and child. The family not only offers a peaceful place for children but also creates an opportunity for adults to bring a child into the world and raise and nurture them. The family not only serves as a source of knowledge and comfort for children but also offers an environment for them to learn the values and virtues derived from their culture. Within the family environment, children begin to learn the morally appropriate standards of action and thought of the local culture they live in (Kagan, 1977). The child's socialization process first begins within the family. Parents transmit their values to children in various ways. Through their own behavior, either explicitly or implicitly, parents choose to transmit the value system of society and the family they have created to children. Values are also assigned to children through various transmission mechanisms outside the family during the socialization process. Teachers, peer groups, the media, and similar factors play a significant role in the child's socialization process (Rosen, 1964).

Children maintain a close relationship with their families. This situation, particularly in industrial societies, is characterized by the concept of familiarization of the child, which refers to the representation of parents in the public sphere as responsible for the child's best interests. This means that parents manage a range of processes, from schooling to political decisions regarding children (Praut, 2000). It is frequently argued that as societies modernize, the value of children within the family will shift from economic to emotional. The reshaping of professions and family structures, particularly after the industrial revolution, accelerated the process of sanctifying and sentimentalizing childhood. However, this progression envisioned through the value of children does not follow the same logic across all societies. For example, a study conducted in China refutes the notion that the value of children shifts from economic to emotional. Accordingly, it has been demonstrated that the value of children in China constitutes a three-dimensional whole consisting of utilitarian, psychological, and social values (Liu, 2022). This notion is also supported by a separate study conducted in China. Cultural change and the perspective on children do not change at the same pace as social change. In this sense, in rural China, the traditional view of children as security for old age, their contribution to the labor force, and many other traditional motives have failed to lead to a rapid decline in the rate of having second and subsequent children,

despite the government's imposition of heavy penalties (Chen, 1985). On the other hand, Kağıtçıbaşı and Ataca (2015) argued that the value of children is determined by social and cultural processes, concluding that children contribute economically to their families and provide security for parents in old age. The rapid modernization of societies has not led to a sharp break in the traditional view of children. While global developments influence a society's view of children, local cultural processes still play a dominant role. Among the primary reasons for this is the continued importance of the family in raising children. Changes in family structure also have significant impacts on children, who are among the most important members of the family. Among the first are the decline in the child population, the persistence of the child labor problem, the displacement of children due to forced migration, and the resulting negative consequences. In this respect, it is impossible to evaluate child labor, which is the main subject of this study, independently of family and cultural processes.

The concept of child labor varies depending on the cultural forms within a society. For example, in some occupations (such as fishing and farming), families involve their children in work because these occupations are considered and protected as family occupations. Therefore, internationally accepted definitions and rights are often seen as contrary to social norms in non-Western societies (Abdullah et al, 2022). Historically, child labor was a normal and widespread practice until recently. In Elizabethan England, where the belief in the appropriateness of child labor was strong, providing cheap child labor was considered an act of charity. It is also known that schools for spinning were established during this period to provide employment for children (Abbott, 1908). The Industrial Revolution is considered a significant turning point in discussions on child labor. According to this approach, after the Industrial Revolution, children began to work on a historically unprecedented scale and under extremely adverse conditions. Similarly, this view argues that children still worked before the Industrial Revolution, but this was done in a context that was not exploitative and was more likely to contribute to family labor (Goulart et al, 2024). Child labor, which has existed throughout history and reached its peak during the Industrial Revolution, continues to exist today. This debate cannot be addressed independently of the family, society, and culture triangle. While both national policies and the work of international organizations have contributed to reducing child labor, this has not reduced it to the desired levels. This study will first examine child labor from a sociological perspective. Child labor will be discussed within the framework of family and culture, and then the manifestations of child labor in different societies will be analyzed. Finally, a socio-economic analysis will be conducted to identify the causes of child labor in Turkey, based on data from the International Labor Organization (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK).

2. The Sociological Position of the Child and Childhood

Until the 1980s, sociological studies on childhood were either sporadic or addressed within the context of a broader social problem such as deviance. Similarly, until this period, there were significant differences between the child as a “human being” and the child as a component of society or culture. Studies on childhood were focused on the themes of child welfare and delinquency. Consequently, for much of the 20th century, children were viewed as a group that caused social problems and therefore required intervention and correction (Shanahan, 2007). There are several reasons for the initial lack of coverage of children and childhood in sociological studies. The first is that children were viewed as peripheral elements of global systems and as future substitutes for adults. The second stems from a professional context. The lack of interest in studies on children within the discipline of sociology and the difficulty of engaging in central discussions on these issues hindered the production of serious studies on children. Despite all this, children and childhood have tended to remain within sociology within certain contexts. For example, children have constituted a significant subject in family- and school-based research (Alanen, 1988). Considering this context, the family has always played a central role in sociologically advanced childhood studies. Child labor and child labor have also been discussed primarily and broadly within the framework of family labor.

The concept of child socialization holds a significant place in discussions of childhood. In this context, this new concept, expressed as “project children,” stems from the idea that children must be equipped with the skills necessary to adapt to the adult world. The origin of this idea is rooted in the developmental psychology paradigm. According to this paradigm, children can only rise to the status of “human” after they have been socialized and domesticated. In this context, this interpretation is problematic because it reduces children to mere human status. However, the sociological perspective, beyond such psychological interpretations, proposes to consider childhood as a structural element and a social status. From this perspective, childhood is integrated into society, and when society is mentioned, it does not only refer to the world of adults, but rather the entire society is considered. Children’s relationships with their peers, teachers, and relatives are some of these types of relationships. Therefore, when examining childhood sociologically, we must closely examine the changing social structure within which children exist, in addition to and beyond the psychological changes they have undergone throughout history (Qvortrup, 1987).

In the post-war period, the perspective on children was shaped particularly by the British experience. The work of Austrian psychoanalysts, particularly in London, contributed to the emergence of a new relationship and understanding between children, family, and society. Psychoanalysts such as Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and Donald Winnicott focused sensitively on the concepts of childrearing and the role of the mother. This understanding gradually spread beyond Britain. While the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child emphasized that

children were individuals requiring protection, World War II revealed how far this was from being achieved. Children were left to die, faced the threat of starvation, and became the objects of fascist education policies (Bernini, 2020). Following the processes that exacerbated children's disadvantaged situation during the war, a new sociological perspective on childhood emerged. This new sociological perspective on childhood approaches the subject based on several principles. The first of these is the idea that childhood should be studied within a political and cultural context rather than as a natural phenomenon. Childhood, like other social categories, is a constructed structure, and although its members constantly change, it has persisted throughout history, becoming an enduring social category. The second principle asserts that children are not passive or inactive in society but rather exist as active agents. The third principle challenges the distinction between adults and children in society and expresses the idea that children are included in all social processes (Ryan, 2008). In this context, two fundamental approaches emerge. The first approach argues that childhood is not a singular experience but rather comprises different types of childhood shaped by the structure, culture, political order, and historical conditions of the society in which it is located. The second approach argues that children's subjective experiences must be explored to understand childhood (Shanahan, 2007).

Parallel to social change throughout history, the perspective on children and childhood has also shifted. In today's world, childhood still cannot be considered independently of the culture in which it is lived. From a sociological perspective, it is impossible to consider childhood as a separate phenomenon, divorcing from family, society, and culture. In this respect, the disadvantaged situation of children is closely linked to the social structure in which they exist. Child labor is the most concrete example of this situation. While in developed countries, child labor is viewed within a strict legal, political, and social framework, in developing or underdeveloped societies, child labor is evaluated more within the context of family, economic, and cultural processes.

3. A Conceptual View of Child Labor

Throughout history, children have worked in many different types of jobs, both within the home and primarily in agriculture and handicrafts. With the Industrial Revolution, children's working conditions changed and became even more difficult. They were forced to work in urban centers and factories. The fact that children were paid lower wages than adults, their lack of strike awareness, and their ease of manipulation led to an ever-increasing number of child laborers. Historically, in the 1800s, child labor was a central component of the economic structure. The idea that children did not contribute to the household's economy was unthinkable (Radfar et al, 2018). In pre-industrial societies, child labor was considered normal. Children generally worked as apprentices, either with their families or elsewhere, contributing to the household economy after the age of six. Furthermore, the puritanical morality prevalent in society sanctified work and

considered idleness a sin. This belief system provided significant evidence legitimizing child labor (Aruga, 1988).

Until recently, the prevalence of child labor, particularly in Europe and America, was influenced by numerous religious, economic, cultural, and social factors. Before the Industrial Revolution, children, who primarily worked in family businesses, were forced to work in different fields and under harsh conditions due to the increased need for labor after the opening of factories. According to Willoughby (1890), a report published in England in 1816 indicated that 50 percent of factory workers were children under the age of 18. Similarly, during this period, children in factories often worked 16-hour days. Children had no free time other than meals and short naps. Even if they survived without illness or accident, they were forced to continue their lives in physically vulnerable and socially deprived conditions. The nature of child labor in England varied depending on the field of work. For example, an 1842 report estimated that one-third of those working in coal mines in England were under the age of eighteen, and more than half of these were under thirteen. Child laborers working 16-hour days in the mines were subjected to various forms of abuse. Humphries (2003), however, notes that this situation, seen in Britain in the 19th century, is not surprising, and that child labor was also widespread in many European countries at the time. For example, a study covering the years 1839-1843 showed that 12.1% of workers in France were children under the age of 16. A study conducted in Belgium in 1843 revealed that children constituted 19.5% of the total workforce. According to Aruga (1988), child labor was also considered normal in the United States. For example, a study conducted in the US in the early 20th century showed that Italian families believed that women's employment negatively impacted family life and that, therefore, child labor was more appropriate. Contrary to popular belief, the expansion of the workforce in the US after World War II was due to the fact that boys and girls dropped out of school to work, rather than women entering the workforce. Data show that between 1940 and 1944, there was a 24% decrease in school enrollment for children aged 15-18, and the number of working children aged 14-17 increased by 200%, reaching over 2 million. In 1940, most boys worked in agriculture, but this decreased significantly by 1944, shifting to manufacturing and retail. Thirty percent of boys aged 16-17 worked in these sectors. Girls, on the other hand, were more likely to work in the service sector. In 1940, 49.8 percent of girls aged 16-17 worked in the service sector. This rate had decreased to 19.9 percent by 1944, as girls began working in manufacturing.

Child labor, which has manifested itself in various forms throughout history, reached a new dimension during and after the Industrial Revolution, transforming into labor exploitation that violates children's nature. Child labor continues to exist after this date and continues to this day. The recognition that children constitute a vulnerable group in the post-war period and the work of international organizations were instrumental in bringing child labor to a more "humane" level. In our time, the definition of child labor, its evaluation within the context of family labor, and its cultural, social, and economic dimensions continue to be debated.

While the concept of child labor may seem simple on the surface, it is quite complex. The sheer number of tasks performed by children makes it difficult to summarize and summarize the concept. For example, children's domestic work is often overlooked in terms of both work and economic value. In this context, the concept of child labor is far from homogeneous. In other words, most children work in unregulated sectors.

Family chores, domestic work, agricultural work, and apprenticeships are some of these. Because definitions and perceptions of children vary across societies, defining the boundaries of child labor becomes difficult (Bhukuth, 2008). In discussions about child labor, some researchers argue that all forms of child labor are unacceptable and must be abolished, while others argue that certain types of work are beneficial for children's development (Martin, 2013). Children's participation in family-based work not only contributes positively to their individual development but also plays a functional role in the intergenerational transmission of cultural values. In this context, there is a significant distinction between child labor and child labor. The former is considered safe and permitted work, while the latter is defined as exploitative work. When children are subjected to work beyond their physical capacity, it interferes with their education, recreation, and recreation. Therefore, an activity and labor that could benefit children's development can become harmful (Tripathi, 2010). From this perspective, it becomes clear that family and society play a significant role in defining and defining child labor. In other words, two approaches to child labor stand out: the first is a local, cultural, and family-based societal perspective, while the second is a global perspective, encompassing legal, political, and international institutions.

The ILO (2021) defines child labor as follows: "The term child labor is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, robs them of their potential and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development." According to the ILO, there are 160 million child laborers worldwide – 97 million girls and 63 million boys. Nearly half of these children work hazardously. According to ILO, hazardous work includes work that exposes children to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse; work underground at height, and in confined spaces; work with hazardous equipment and tools; work involving hazardous substances; and work that involves long hours or nights. According to UNICEF (2024), "Child labor refers to work that children are too young to perform or that, by its nature or circumstances, may be hazardous. Unlike activities that contribute to children's development (such as contributing to light housework or participating in work during school holidays), child labor harms a child's health, safety, or moral development." As can be seen from the definitions, work within the family and under family supervision can contribute to children's development, while work outside this scope can pose risks for children. The table below (Table 1) shows hazardous work that poses numerous risks to children. A closer examination of the table reveals that child-oriented work poses far more dangers than meets the eye. Therefore, legal regulations, government policies, and the

efforts of national and international civil society organizations are crucial in preventing this aspect of child labor.

Table 1. Children's work and its hazards.

Occupation/industry	Hazards
Abattoirs and meat rendering	Injuries from cuts, burns, falls, dangerous equipment; exposure to infectious disease; heat stress
Agriculture	Unsafe machinery; hazardous substances; accidents; chemical poisoning; arduous work; dangerous animals, insects and reptiles
Alcohol production and/or sale	Intoxication, addiction; environment may be prejudicial to morals; risk of violence
Carpet-weaving	Dust inhalation, poor lighting, poor posture (squatting); respiratory and musculoskeletal diseases; eye strain; chemical poisoning
Cement	Harmful chemicals, exposure to harmful dust; arduous work; respiratory and musculoskeletal disease
Construction and/or demolition	Exposure to heat, cold, dust; falling objects; sharp objects; accidents; musculoskeletal diseases
Cranes/hoists/lifting machinery Tar, asphalt, bitumen	Accidents; falling objects; musculoskeletal diseases; risk of injury to others Exposure to heat, burns; chemical poisoning; respiratory diseases
Crystal and/or glass manufacture	Molten glass; extreme heat; poor ventilation; cuts from broken glass; carrying hot glass; burns; respiratory disease; heat stress; toxic dust
Domestic service	Long hours; physical, emotional, sexual abuse; malnutrition; insufficient rest; isolation
Electricity	Dangerous work with high voltage; risk of falling; high level of responsibility for safety of others
Entertainment (night clubs, bars, casinos, circuses, gambling halls)	Long, late hours; sexual abuse; exploitation; prejudicial to morals
Explosives (manufacture and handling)	Risk of explosion, fire, burns, mortal danger
Hospitals and work with risk of infection	Infectious diseases; responsibility for well-being of others

Lead/zinc metallurgy	Cumulative poisoning; neurological damage
Machinery in motion (operation, cleaning, repairs, etc.)	Danger from moving engine parts; accidents; cuts, burns, exposure to heat and noise; noise stress; eye and ear injuries
Maritime work (trimmers and stokers, stevedores)	Accidents: heat, burns; falls from heights; heavy lifting, arduous work, musculoskeletal diseases; respiratory diseases
Mining, quarries, underground work	Exposure to dust, gases, fumes, dirty conditions; respiratory and musculoskeletal diseases; accidents; falling objects; arduous work; heavy loads
Rubber	Heat, burns, chemical poisoning
Street trades	Exposure to drugs, violence, criminal activities; heavy loads; musculoskeletal diseases; venereal diseases; accidents
Tanneries	Chemical poisoning; sharp instruments; respiratory diseases
Transportation, operating vehicles	Accidents; danger to self and passengers
Underwater (e.g., pearl diving)	Decompression illness; dangerous fish; death or injury
Welding and smelting of metals, metalworking	Exposure to extreme heat; flying sparks and hot metal objects; accidents; eye injuries; heat stress

Source: (Warshaw, 1988)

While the ILO has studies and policies to reduce child labor, these efforts are not resonating in every region of the world. For example, while child labor has decreased in Asia and the Pacific, it is increasing in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to reports compiled from various data sources, child labor is largely carried out to contribute to family incomes. In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than 95% of child labor occurs to contribute to household income, while this rate is around 75% in India. In India, child labor regulations prohibit all children under the age of 14 from working in hazardous work by 2025 (Mukhopadhyaya et al, 2012). While the international community has been working to reduce child labor, the trend has recently reversed in some regions, with increases in the number of child laborers. Between 2016 and

2020, child labor and the number of children working in hazardous conditions (6.5 million more children) have increased, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Conversely, 79 million children are working hazardously. More than 70% of children work in agriculture (commercial and family farms), while 30% work primarily in manufacturing, mining, and domestic service. It is known that one in three child laborers are out of school. Twenty-eight percent of children aged 5-11 and 35% of adolescents aged 12-14 who are subjected to child labor are out of school (UNICEF, 2023).

4. Literature Review

Child labor is studied by many different scientific disciplines. Each discipline evaluates the situation from its own perspective and discusses the issue within the parameters specific to that field. Sociology, on the other hand, categorically examines child labor under the heading of childhood. Developments in sociology, particularly after World War II, have resulted in the frequent inclusion of childhood within sociology. When considered within this context, child labor is addressed within a wide range of variables, including family, culture, economy, education, politics, and migration.

Family and society are crucial in understanding the boundaries of child labor. A lack of parental education can lead to children starting work at an early age. Similarly, children living in broken families are at a greater disadvantage in terms of starting child labor at an early age. For example, a study of single-parent families in Asia found that child labor is more prevalent in areas where women are the head of the family. Similarly, from a societal perspective, child labor is more prevalent in regions where child labor has been prevalent for generations and access to better jobs through education is not possible (Martin, 2013). There is a significant relationship between children's schooling and child labor. The culture of a society, economic crises, poverty, living conditions, and access to services all significantly influence children's choices between work and school. For example, a study conducted in Egypt on out-of-school girls found that families disregard education, that they live in poverty, and that the belief that girls will eventually help them with household chores is influential. Another study from Egypt revealed that girls are not sent to school because they are responsible for helping with household chores and caring for younger siblings (Assaad et al, 2010). Another study demonstrating the relationship between education and child labor was conducted in India. According to research conducted in India, children reported dropping out of school to work in 17% of cases, and children aged 5-11, predominantly girls, cited caring for their siblings as the primary reason for their absence from school (Philips et al, 2014). A study conducted in Egypt also identified high school dropout and family breakdown as contributing factors to child labor. In the same study, it was observed that child workers had high levels of stress and fatigue and were frequently subjected to verbal abuse by their employers (Elsayed, 2024).

Agriculture is one of the areas where child labor is most prevalent. The fact that agriculture is largely carried out by families leads to child labor in this sector

being evaluated more in the context of contributing to household labor. According to Vos & Takeshima (2021), although this figure varies across different regions of the world, child labor is frequently used in agriculture, particularly in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, in Ethiopia, more than a third of children aged 5-14 work in farm work. According to Kis-Katos & Schulze (2011), while child labor in Indonesia has decreased over the years, it has not reached the desired level. The labor force participation rate of children aged 10-14 decreased from 22.1% in 1960 to 5.2% in 2007. A large portion of children in Indonesia are employed in agriculture. For example, a 2002 study found that more than 65% of all working children were employed in agriculture. According to the Child Labor Assessment Report (2024), a 2024 study conducted in Turkey found that child labor constitutes a significant problem among Syrian refugees. It found that children are commonly involved in begging and street vending. Meanwhile, girls work in agriculture, restaurants, and cleaning, while boys work in construction. 76% of the children surveyed are absent from school due to their work obligations.

A study of 200 children working in handicraft workshops in Morocco revealed that the children suffer from respiratory, digestive, and skin disorders, as well as psychological problems such as irritability and insomnia. A study comparing working and non-working children in Lebanon between the ages of 10 and 17 found that working children have physical health problems and require intensive social care (Srivastava, 2011). Data from 2022 in Bangladesh indicate that there are 3.54 million child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17. 77% of working children are boys, while 23% are girls (Hoque, 2024). In a study conducted in the Philippines with children under the age of 18 who came to the capital from various cities to work, most children said that working was necessary to contribute to the family budget. Furthermore, children stated that before migrating, they contacted relatives or friends in the capital and found jobs this way (Camacho, 1999). In Brazil, children in poor families begin working at an early age. Child labor is often overlooked because it requires low wages, lacks formal participation, and can be unsupervised. Furthermore, domestic child labor in Brazil is mostly carried out by girls. In 2019, it was found that 85% of the children and adolescents participating in such studies were girls. Another study found that girls take on more responsibility for household chores and caring for younger siblings (Azevedo & Bezerra Leite, 2023). In a field study conducted in Istanbul with 20 migrant child workers under the age of 15, the children stated that they worked for reasons such as contributing to the family's income, educating their siblings, and helping those who remained in the homeland (Şen & Kahraman, 2012).

Child labor has a cultural dimension, and it is crucial. A study conducted in slums in Bangladesh concluded that fear of involvement in crime and idleness, rather than economic gain, dominated families' decisions to have their children work. In the same study, families stated that children's work was a way to prepare them for adulthood. Families stated that children contribute little to the household economy but that they wanted them to work due to cultural factors (Amin et al,

2004). Child labor also has a political dimension. In an inclusive political system, wealth is distributed equitably, while in an exclusionary political system, income inequalities emerge, increasing the visibility of child labor. For example, child labor in Pakistan arises because of income inequality, where children have no choice but to resort to child labor to supplement their meager income. When opportunities and opportunities are scarce, child labor is considered a necessary resort. Conversely, child laborers in Pakistan, in addition to working in poor and harsh conditions, may also face physical abuse. It is known that such cases are more common, especially among girls (Gilani et al, 2022).

The economic conditions of a country can significantly determine the prevalence or decline of child labor. For example, a study conducted in Vietnam revealed that child labor decreased as living conditions improved. In Vietnam, the number of children working in rice fields tended to decrease with the improvement in rice prices (Beegle et al, 2004). A similar situation also occurred in China and Thailand. China's rapid growth after 1970 brought about a sharp decline in child labor. In Thailand, the labor force participation rate of children aged 14-15 decreased by 50% between 1985 and 1995, a period when average annual growth was 9% (Basu & Tzannatos, 2003).

5. Methodology

This study was designed qualitatively. Considering the subject matter of the study, it was deemed appropriate to adopt a qualitative method, and therefore, the data set was accessed through document analysis. Document analysis involves the examination of both printed and electronic documents. As with other qualitative methods, the examination and interpretation of data constitute a crucial aspect of document analysis. Document analysis is conducted by examining documents obtained because of processes in which the researcher is not involved. Documents can include many types of documents. For example, advertisements, meeting minutes, brochures, diaries, maps, reports, survey data, and many other materials can serve as the primary objects of examination in document analysis. The documents used in document analysis are used to verify findings and support data from different sources. In this sense, sociologists, in particular, frequently use document analysis to verify their findings (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis provides certain advantages for research. Some of these advantages include accessing data that would otherwise take a long time to collect and compile, accessing and using studies conducted in different societies, comparing numerous documents and research, and providing advantages in terms of time and financial constraints (Morgan, 2022). Document analysis, which encompasses a wide variety of sources, provides an advantage for the researcher. Another advantage of this method is that the data is readily available, eliminating the need for the researcher to ask questions and conduct tests. Document analysis can be applied wherever readily available materials are available and can be integrated into all research models as resources permit (Mayring, 2011).

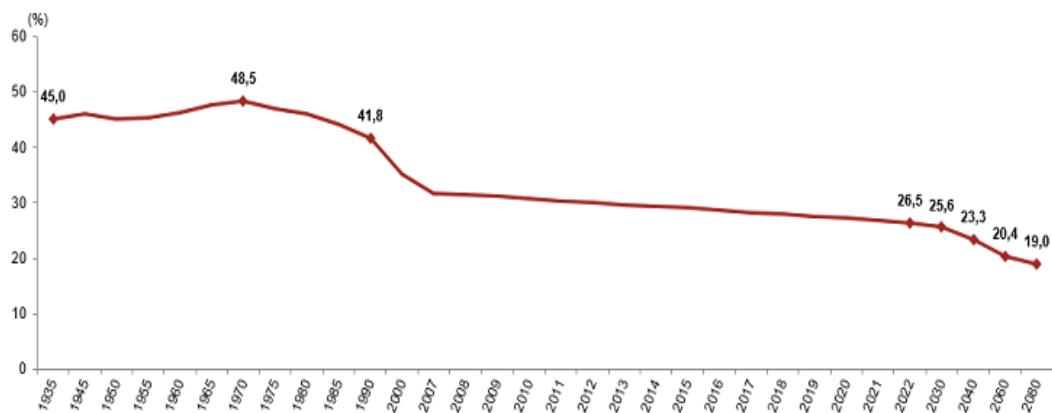
Documents and reports used in qualitative research are viewed by researchers as objects that convey social meaning. In this respect, researchers conducting qualitative research attempt to uncover the deeper meaning behind documents by examining such documents from a more constructive perspective (Neuman, 2012). Different methods are employed in analyzing the data obtained in qualitative studies. The common points that stand out in these different forms of analysis are description, analysis, and interpretation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In document analysis, it is important to select relevant data from the available dataset and to identify descriptive themes based on the outcomes to be obtained. The context in which the documents will contribute to the research and their value for the research are important factors for selection (Kümbetoglu, 2015). In this context, reports from various public and private institutions and organizations will be used within the scope of the study. Reports on child labor prepared by the ILO, UNICEF, and TÜİK will be examined using document analysis and subjected to descriptive analysis. Child labor, which has emerged as a family-child problem, particularly in Turkey, will be evaluated through reports to uncover the underlying meanings of this problem. The reports aim to identify specific themes, and within these themes, child labor will be addressed from a socio-economic perspective.

6. Findings

The General Situation Regarding Children in Turkey

As is the case worldwide, the population in Turkey is aging. One of the most significant indicators of population aging is the gradual decrease in the number of children. An aging population exposes societies to various social, economic, cultural, and traditional risks. On the other hand, states are striving to develop various solutions to prevent population aging. These include strengthening the family structure, increasing the number of children, addressing caregiving problems, and efforts to reduce divorce. Consequently, each state strives to develop projects tailored to its own social structure. For example, 2025 has been declared the “Year of the Family” in Turkey. This year aims to strengthen the family and discuss family-related issues, and numerous events are being organized within this framework. Children are among the most frequently discussed family-related issues in Turkey. Children are the subject of debate in many areas, including education, migration, labor, population, and care.

Figure 1. Proportion of child population in total population, 1935-2080



Source: (TÜİK, 2022)

The graph above shows the distribution of the child population within Turkey's total population and projections for the coming years. As can be seen, the population is aging, and the child population is on a downward trend. The child population, which was on the rise until the early 2000s, began to gradually decline after 2000. The primary reasons for this are undoubtedly changes in family structure. For example, the increasing rate of divorce, the decline in marriages, consideration of the "economic" cost of children, couples' increasing adoption of a one-child policy, and childcare challenges are among the factors contributing to the decline in the child population. A look at TÜİK (2024) data also provides data supporting this picture. In 2024, the total fertility rate in Turkey was measured at 1.48, falling below the population replacement rate of 2.10. In this respect, Turkey fell below the fertility rates of many European countries such as France, Denmark, and Ireland. This situation persists in Turkey's child population projections.

In Turkey, children's educational status and its relationship with other education-related factors are important. A review of the literature reveals a close relationship between educational status or a family's perspective on education and child labor. According to the TÜİK (2024a) report, the net schooling rate for 5-year-olds was 84.5% for boys and 84% for girls. When the secondary school completion rate was examined by gender, it was found that this rate was 79.4% for boys and 83.0% for girls in the 2023-2024 academic year. This data suggests that boys dropped out of school due to the need to work, while girls, due to both attending school and working in the household, did not experience any problems with school attendance. Another TÜİK data supports this. In 2024, the labor force participation rates for children aged 15-17 were 35.6% for boys and 13.7% for girls. Azevedo & Bezerra Leite (2023) found results in their study in Brazil that support this situation in Turkey. According to this, girls are more likely to work in the household in Brazil.

The table above shows the distribution of households by need groups for children under the age of 15. It's clear which needs are met by their households. Children have many different needs, and failure to meet these needs within the household can be considered a risk factor that can lead to child labor. Approximately 10% of children under the age of 15 reported being unable to afford

new clothing or shoes due to financial deprivation. Considering that children are in a developmental age, the critical importance of adequate nutrition is undeniable. While access to healthy and sufficient food has a positive impact on children's development, their absence can lead to numerous risks. In addition to health-related risks, children are likely to work to contribute to the household's well-being. In this context, the table shows that roughly one in four children lack access to at least one meal containing meat, chicken, or fish per day, while another 10% of children lack access to fresh fruit and vegetables at least once a day due to financial constraints. Another striking aspect of the table is children's play and leisure activities. Kagan (1977) and Corsaro (1979) argue that play plays a crucial role in children's language and self-development, and that children's relationships and communication with their families also play a critical role in development. In this context, 11.7% of children lack toys at home due to financial constraints, and approximately 20% are unable to participate in leisure activities.

Table 2. Distribution of households according to the status of having children in need groups, 2024

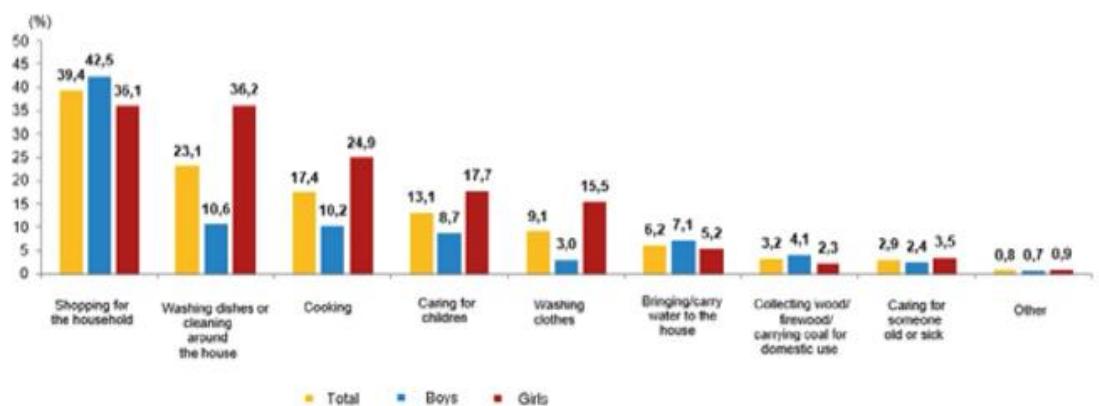
Children's need groups	Total	Ability to have	State of possession		Those who cannot have it for other reasons
			Those who cannot have due to financial inadequacy	Those who cannot have it for other reasons	
New (not second-hand) clothes	100,0	88,6	9,2	2,2	
Two pairs of properly fitting shoes	100,0	88,2	9,4	2,3	
Fruits and vegetables at least once a day	100,0	86,7	10,0	3,3	
A meal with meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian equivalent at least once a day	100,0	69,8	23,1	7,2	
Books suitable for their age	100,0	83,3	8,0	8,7	
Outdoor leisure equipment such as a bicycle, roller skates, etc.	100,0	64,5	16,5	19,0	
Age-appropriate indoor toys or games	100,0	75,5	11,7	12,8	
Participation in leisure activities	100,0	35,9	18,2	45,9	
Participation in special day celebrations	100,0	68,6	10,1	21,3	
Invite friends to play or eat from time to time	100,0	58,7	8,7	32,6	
Go on holiday away from home at least one week per year	100,0	51,2	22,2	26,6	
Participation in school trips and school events that cost money	100,0	55,0	18,7	26,3	
Suitable place to study or do homework at home	100,0	78,5	11,2	10,3	

Source: (TÜİK, 2024)

The Perspectives on Child Labor in Turkey

Because children are considered disadvantaged groups, they are likely to face a variety of risks. As is the case globally, child labor is one of the most fundamental problems in Turkey. In this respect, child labor creates a situation that solidifies and multiplies their disadvantages. Child labor is closely linked to the structure of the society in which children exist. A society's values, beliefs, culture, and history shape its perspective on children, as they do in every field. It would be erroneous to evaluate child labor, which arises from a situation in which society exerts such influence, independently of Turkey's social reality. In other words, when discussing child labor in Turkey, it is inevitable to consider numerous variables such as family, education, culture, economy, and values. Discussions about child labor require a separate discussion, specifically in Turkey. Children are particularly affected by the massive migration to Turkey following the Syrian war and the subsequent developments. In this context, in addition to child labor, the employment of migrant children should also be kept on the agenda for a clearer understanding of the issue.

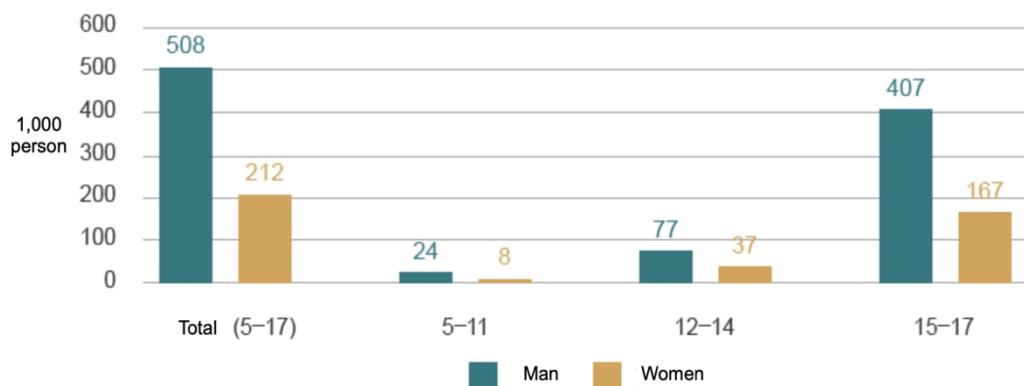
Figure 2. Proportion of children aged 5-17 who have done at least one housework in the last week by type of housework and sex, 2022



Source: (TÜİK, 2023)

The graph above shows the type of housework performed by children aged 5-17 in Turkey and their involvement in housework at least once a week, by gender. This 2022 data reveals a gender gap in the distribution of child labor. Accordingly, boys play an active role in tasks such as shopping, carrying water, and carrying firewood and coal, while girls are more likely to be responsible for activities such as house cleaning, cooking, and childcare. Overall, 52.5% of children aged 5-17 reported performing at least one household chore in the past week. The fact that girls in Turkey are more likely to engage in household chores than boys is consistent with global findings. A report by UNICEF and ILO (2025) also indicates that, when household chores are considered, the proportion of girls engaged in child labor is higher than that of boys. In this context, it can be argued that domestic work is an unseen aspect of child labor. It is understood that children have a large share in the distribution of the workload within the family and that there are also gender inequalities in this distribution.

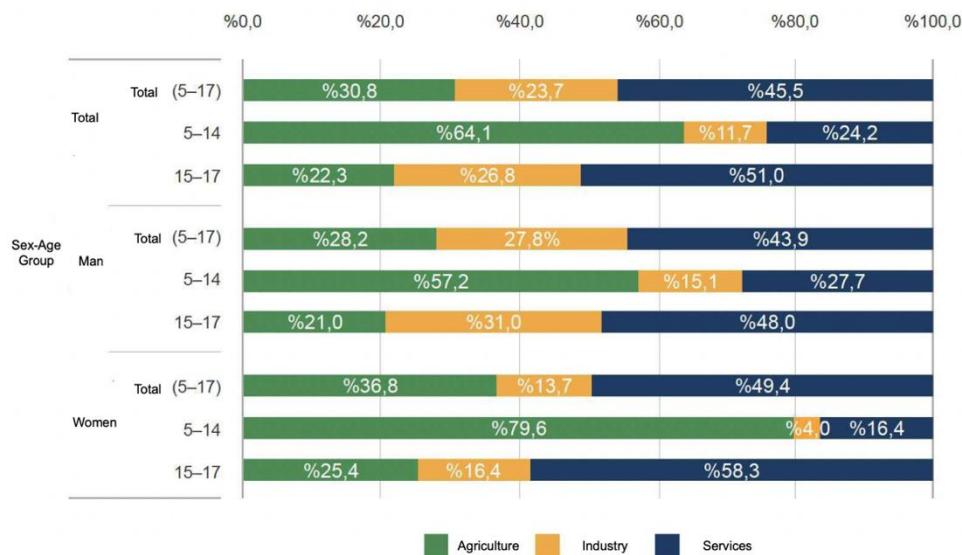
Figure 3. Children working in economic activities by age group and gender, Quarter IV: October-December, 2019



Source: (TÜİK, 2020)

The graph above shows the employment status and gender distribution of children aged 5-17 working in Turkey. This shows that there are a total of 720,000 child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17. The employment status of children varies significantly by age group and gender. Accordingly, boys are more likely to work than girls across all age groups. Conversely, when examined within age groups, the 5-11 age group has the lowest number of child laborers. The employment rates of both boys and girls increase with age. While these data specific to Turkey are similar when compared to other examples worldwide, some differences can be noted. For example, according to the UNICEF & ILO (2025) report, while the employment rate of girls decreases with age globally, the opposite is true in Turkey. In Turkey, the employment rate of children increases with age for both genders.

Figure 4. Children working in economic activities by economic activity, Quarter IV: October-December, 2019 (%)



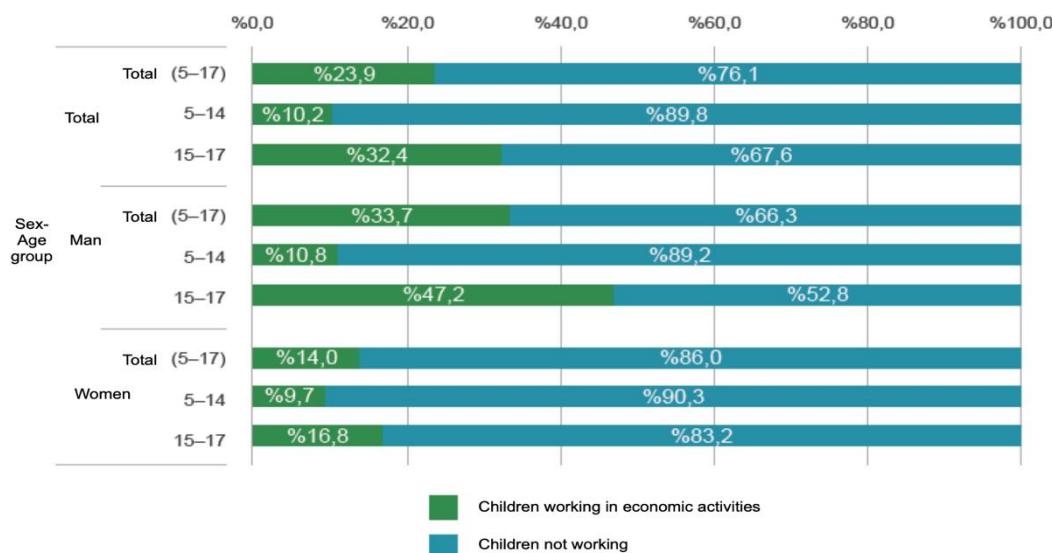
Source: (TÜİK, 2020)

The graph above shows the sectors in which children aged 5-17 work. Accordingly, 45.5% of children work in services, 30.8% in agriculture, and 23.7% in industry. According to the UNICEF & ILO (2025) report, 61% of working children aged 5-17 worldwide are employed in agriculture. In this regard, it appears that children in Turkey are working more intensively in non-agricultural sectors. A sectoral analysis reveals a striking pattern unique to Turkey. While girls' employment in agriculture declines globally with increasing age, the opposite trend is observed in Turkey. In Turkey, girls aged 5-14 and 15-17 are more heavily engaged in agricultural work than boys in the same age groups. Family and regional factors undoubtedly play a significant role in this. While girls in families whose families are engaged in agriculture or migrate seasonally for agricultural work participate in this family activity, boys may continue to work outside the home in various sectors. In other words, due to familial, cultural, and regional factors, boys may seek employment outside the home at an earlier age. The industrial employment status in the table supports this analysis. The industrial employment rate for boys aged 5-14 is 15.1%, while the employment rate for girls in the same age group is 4%.

One of the most critical points in discussions about child labor is children forced to work in "hazardous work." Children worldwide work in many different sectors and contribute to family labor. ILO & UNICEF (2021) define hazardous work as "work that, by its nature or the conditions in which it is performed, is harmful to children's health, safety, or moral development." It is estimated that 79 million children worldwide work in hazardous work. In Turkey, the number of children working in hazardous work is 520,000 (UNICEF, 2022). One of the major misconceptions here is the idea that children are safe from harm because they work in family-based work. 72% of child labor worldwide occurs on family farms and small family businesses. In family-based child labor, one in four children aged 5 to

11 and almost half of children aged 12 to 14 work in work that could harm their health, safety, or morals. Furthermore, working in hazardous work negatively impacts children's ability to attend school. Globally, 43.6% of children working in hazardous occupations are unable to attend school (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). In Turkey, the first national program, "Time-Bound Policy and Program Framework for the Prevention of Child Labor," which defines the worst forms of child labor as "heavy and hazardous work on the street, in small and medium-sized enterprises, in agriculture outside of family responsibilities, and in paid migratory and temporary agricultural work," was developed and implemented between 2005 and 2015. Within the scope of combating child labor, 2018 was declared the "Year of Combating Child Labor" (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Strategy and Budget Directorate, 2023). An examination of the physical health of working children in Turkey reveals that 12.9% work in extremely hot/cold or extremely humid/humid environments, and 10.8% are exposed to chemicals, dust, smoke, or harmful gases. 10.1% of working children were exposed to awkward postures or movements, or carried heavy loads, while 10% were exposed to noise or severe shock (TÜİK, 2020). Considering that over 500,000 children work in hazardous occupations in Turkey, it's understandable that this data is insufficient to explain the hazards children are exposed to. TÜİK also acknowledges this in its statement regarding the reliability of the report's data. This aspect of child labor is not clearly understood in the Turkish context. In this context, a review of the Occupational Health and Safety Assembly (2025) report reveals that 60 to 70 child workers in Turkey lose their lives each year because of hazards arising from their work environment. The report, compiled by İSİG based on information obtained 90% from the national press and 10% from the families, colleagues, and local press, indicates that 770 child workers lost their lives due to working in hazardous occupations between 2013 and 2025. When evaluated in this context, it is necessary to increase both the collection of data and the work on children working in hazardous jobs.

Figure 5. Employment status of children not attending education, 4th Quarter: October–December, 2019 (%)

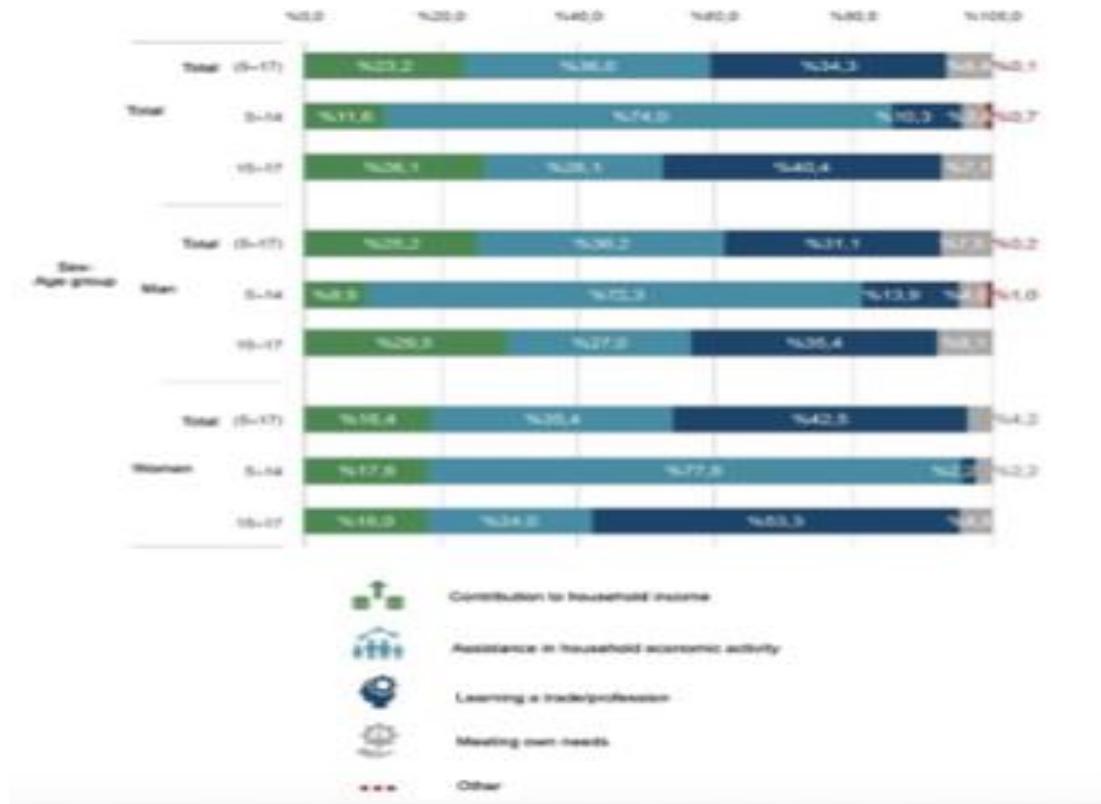


Source: (TÜİK, 2020).

Education is a key issue in child labor. The fact that school-aged children are forced to work for various reasons negatively impacts their ability to attend school and further exacerbates their disadvantaged situation. The graph above illustrates the situation of children who are out of school. Accordingly, 34.3% of working children are unable to attend school. 23.9% of children above the compulsory school starting age who are not attending school are engaged in economic activities. According to the ILO & UNICEF (2021) report, more than a third of all child laborers worldwide are unable to attend school. This rate is even higher for children working in hazardous occupations. In Turkey, the situation of migrant children is also considered a separate category. Accordingly, as of September 2023, Turkey hosted over 1.3 million children under temporary and international protection; more than 1 million of these children were enrolled in school, while 300,000 were out of school. The primary reason for children not attending school was economic obstacles (38%), followed by child labor (17%). Considering the link between economic reasons and child labor, nearly half of school-aged immigrant children are unable to attend school because they are forced to work (UNICEF, 2024a). Furthermore, family structure in Turkey is closely linked to children's education, school attendance, and the resulting child labor. Broken families, single-parent families, or living with family members other than their parents increase children's risk of child labor. This increases the likelihood of girls taking on more responsibility for household chores and boys working outside the home. Fieldwork revealed that some families consider child labor a source of income. Gender-based discrimination is also evident in families' expectations. For example, while the greater variety of job options for boys compared to girls allows them to work in a variety of jobs, even outside the city, families consider it more appropriate for girls to be employed in textiles, agriculture, and domestic work.

This undoubtedly negatively impacts children's school attendance (UNICEF, 2024b).

Figure 6. Children working in economic activities by reason of employment, Quarter IV: October-December, 2019 (%)



Source: (TÜİK, 2020).

The table above shows the classification of children in Turkey based on their reasons for working. Accordingly, approximately 60% of children aged 5-17 work to contribute to the household's economic activities and increase family income. This is the leading reason for working for both girls and boys. In Turkey, the family's economic situation or the children's support for their families also ranks first among the reasons for not attending school. Nearly one in four children aged 6-17 in Turkey report that they are unable to attend school because they are forced to work for economic reasons (TÜİK, 2022). Furthermore, data indicates that more than 7 million children in Turkey were poor as of 2024 (TÜİK, 2025). Regional differences specific to Turkey appear significant in relation to economic status. For example, children are more likely to work as seasonal workers in regions where agriculture and animal husbandry are intensive. In provinces like Şanlıurfa and Samsun, children work intensively during the cotton and hazelnut harvest, while in Muş, where animal husbandry is intensive, they work as shepherds (UNICEF, 2024b). From this perspective, children primarily work to support their families,

but regional economic disparities specific to Turkey also influence the nature of child labor.

7. Conclusions

It is a fact that child labor has been observed throughout history. As societies change and develop, so too do the perspectives on child labor. It is because change does not occur at the same pace and diversity in every society, it is quite difficult to speak of a single perspective on child labor, just as it is with the perspective on children. Perceptions of child labor can vary across different societies, as well as within different regions within the same society.

While progress has been made in the current perspective on childhood and child labor, this progress is not at the desired level. Developments in recent history constitute a significant point here. With the 19th century, there was a significant shift in the perspective of childhood, reaching its peak after World War II. Until this period, children, who had been viewed as miniature adults, began to be viewed as individuals, and childhood became a category with its own unique characteristics. The fact that children were forced to work under harsh conditions, just like adults, during the Industrial Revolution, is significant evidence that children and adults were perceived as being the same. During this period, children were forced to work under extremely harsh conditions, leading to the emergence of one of the harshest and most brutal forms of child labor in history.

Children, considered sociologically disadvantaged groups, are known to face numerous risks in today's world. Children's vulnerability may increase further in disasters, in the workplace, and within families and communities. Child labor is among the most significant risks children face. From a socioeconomic perspective, economics, culture, family, social structure, beliefs, values, population, and many other factors are important variables in assessing child labor. While different disciplines address child labor from different perspectives, the sociological perspective recommends focusing more on social conditions. The family and society in which a child lives are crucial for their self-development and also contribute to their internalization of the values and culture of that society. In this context, child labor is considered a phenomenon closely linked to the cultural structure of the society under study.

Child labor is a prominent topic of discussion in Turkey, as it is worldwide. Organizations such as the ILO and UNICEF are working to reduce child labor globally and are calling on countries to do the same, urging them to combat it. Turkey is taking significant steps to combat child labor, both in response to recommendations from international organizations and through policies developed at the state level. Despite these efforts, child labor in Turkey, as elsewhere in the world, has not been reduced to the desired level. One of the key reasons for this is the continuing diversity of societal perspectives toward children. Familial and societal perspectives play a significant role in how children and child labor, considered a child-related issue, are viewed. This study attempts to analyze the

different manifestations of child labor in Turkey and compares this situation with other countries worldwide.

The manifestations of child labor in Turkey vary. When data sets compiled from the ILO, UNICEF, and TÜİK datasets are examined, factors such as family, education, migration, seasonal work, and economic status emerge as variables that shape the picture of child labor in Turkey.

The child population in Turkey is gradually decreasing, and the country's population is rapidly aging. The aging population and the decrease in the number of children are increasing the need for labor. The employment of children, especially in the agricultural sector and family businesses, is a significant factor in this. Children are among the groups whose labor is most sought after by families. Numerous socio-economic factors, such as the lack of remuneration for child labor, the desire to teach children a profession, and the desire to fill their free time, contribute to child labor. An examination of the data reveals that a significant portion of children in Turkey work to support their families. Family and family-related variables constitute one of the obstacles to reducing child labor in Turkey.

Migration and seasonal work, which can be considered family-related, emerge as a risk factor increasing child labor in Turkey. Regional differences specific to Turkey are significant here. Because children live dependently on their families for a certain period, family mobility necessitates children to move with them. Seasonal migration is one of the most prominent examples of this. In Turkey, seasonal migration occurs mostly from eastern provinces to the Black Sea and Aegean regions, and agricultural products play a critical role in determining the timing of migration. Variations in harvest times, depending on the crop, sometimes coincide with children's school years, forcing children dependent on their families to interrupt their education.

Education is a significant variable in child labor in Turkey. Data analysis reveals that a significant portion of children who are required to work experience difficulties attending school. This situation in Turkey is similar to other countries in the literature. Children's increasing disengagement from education can expose them to a variety of risks, particularly crime. Therefore, reevaluating education policies in Turkey to prevent child labor is considered crucial.

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