

# Sustainability in Education in Vulnerable Groups: Access to Education Services for Children of Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Worker Families in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine educational status of seasonal migrant agricultural worker (SMAW) families and their children, one of the vulnerable groups in Türkiye, under pre-pandemic conditions, as well as their access to educational services during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this study, designed according to the mixed research method, purposive sampling was used. The data were collected through face-to-face surveys, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and key person/institution interviews. The findings showed that adults and children in SMAW households were mostly primary or middle school graduates due to financial constraints, and unlike boys, girls dropped out of school due to gender-based reasons such as early marriage and the belief that girls should not be educated. With the pandemic, it revealed that the existing problems experienced by children in SMAW households regarding access to education and its sustainability have deepened further. The findings of this study suggest that without the development of necessary support mechanisms to increase the continuity of education for children who start working for the first time with their parents in the agricultural sector during the pandemic period, it is inevitable and permanent that the children who started working during this period will be disconnected from education in the long term.

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## INTRODUCTION

When the change and development of education in history is examined, it is evident that outbreaks of

policies, and practices within education systems. These influences, which shape the structure, content, scope, implementation, and duration of

education, have brought about structural changes beyond momentary adjustments. With the emphasis on the notion that “when music changes, so does dance,” Yıldırım (2021) argued that these structural changes in education should be on the basis of the infrastructure, human resources, and educational programs. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) discussed lessons from the pandemic on how to construct an effective learning environment in its study titled “Lessons for Education from COVID-19”. According to this research, an effective learning environment should focus on individuals and processes rather than physical spaces or resources. In this way, learning gains a flexible structure that can take place anywhere, anytime, and education systems are not too rigid to be adapted to changing conditions or too heavy to be carried. In the same study, the OECD highlighted the necessity of emphasizing flexible learning focus, educator skills, and student equity in pre-crisis educational policies.

Since the early months of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020, has brought about radical changes in curricula and classroom practices. During this period, many countries announced the temporary suspension of face-to-face education and continued teaching through distance learning tools. According to the OECD (2020) report, 30 member countries, including Türkiye, decided to close schools during the early stages of the pandemic, prompting them to make emergency plans for distance education.

During the period of distance education, education administrators and schools have turned to technology-based solutions to ensure sustainability and reshape educational services. Video conferences, live and synchronous remote lessons, and online learning tools have become common tools used by teachers worldwide to reach students and maintain contact with them. In countries where technological infrastructure is insufficient, national television channels and radio broadcasts were primarily preferred to deliver educational materials to students (Development Workshop, 2020a).

In response to the emerging need to reshape education services and develop new strategies, the

Ministry of National Education (MEB) and the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) in Türkiye announced that formal education was suspended for three weeks as of March 16, 2020, and one week later, it was decided to switch to distance education and continue the academic period. In order to ensure continuity in education services, preparations were made to reach students through the Education Informatics Network (EBA) and Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) channels. Within a limited two-week period, initial video recordings were made in subjects such as Turkish, mathematics, social studies, and English, and efforts were made to connect students with distance education lessons.

Distance education is a form of educational activity that encompasses various physical, technological, and educational components, used to meet the learning needs that arise when students are distanced from instruction and resources in terms of time and location. Like most educational activities, the purpose of distance education is to assist students in meeting their learning needs, facilitate their effective access to information, and enable them to apply what they have learned to their daily lives (Chen, 2010). It was assumed that technology integration in education and distance education activities would provide solutions to issues such as economic competitiveness, learning-teaching problems and inequality, and injustice between classes (Collins & Halverson, 2010; Cuban, 2001). However, at the point reached due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is difficult to say that distance education around the world has fully achieved its intended success due to the “mismatches between expectations and tools used”, “the lack of a crisis management plan specifically for emergency/crisis periods,” and the “inequalities in variable socioeconomic classes and vulnerable groups.” In response to these challenges, the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in Türkiye has been striving to ensure the continuity of educational services through EBA and TRT channels during the distance education process. Simultaneously, they have developed strategies, particularly targeting vulnerable groups, to increase inclusivity and overcome barriers to accessing education. These strategies included initiatives such as providing free

internet support, establishing 24-hour accessible call centers, and implementing EBA support points.

Ministries of education worldwide have endeavored to uphold the principle of equal opportunities in planning for distance education. However, despite all efforts, they have faced numerous challenges in providing similar quality education opportunities to all citizens. Many factors such as students' situations of being affected by the pandemic, their families' economic status, family structure, living environment conditions, access to information and communication technologies, and their proficiency in using them have exacerbated inequalities during the distance education process. With both direct and indirect effects of Covid-19 pandemic, experiences have shown that there is a need for sustainable policies and strategic planning to provide equal opportunities in education (OECD, 2020). With the closure of educational institutions and the interruption of face-to-face education due to the pandemic, the student population affected worldwide reached 1.6 billion students (UNESCO, 2020; ILO & UNICEF, 2020), which corresponds to approximately half of the student population across all education levels. According to a report published by UNESCO, the number of students directly affected by the interruption of education in Türkiye is around 25 million. While the direct effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the field of education can be clearly expressed in numbers through research, defining and investigating the indirect effects will contribute to radical reform and strategic planning that are proposed to be presented together with evaluations regarding education during the pandemic.

With the global spread of the pandemic, medium and long-term effects have begun to emerge in areas such as the economy, production, agriculture and livestock, urbanization, work life, and mental health. Activities in sectors such as the service industry, transportation, and industrial production have come to a halt or completely ceased. Therefore, evaluating the reflections of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on societal life and various economic sectors such as the service industry or production in the field of education will help better understand and analyze the indirect effects of the pandemic on education.

In recent years, disasters and crises experienced in Türkiye and around the world in the context of economic, health, and sociological dynamics have further deepened the needs of socio-economically disadvantaged groups and the risks they face, and made "vulnerable groups" more visible.

When the factors that define or contribute to vulnerability are examined within the context of guidelines and policy documents (such as CIOMS, UNESCO Declaration, Helsinki Declaration, Australian National Statement, TCPS2, Belmont Report), it is observed that factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, minority status, health condition, and state of deprivation of freedom are listed as factors associated with vulnerability (Morawa, 2003). According to the CIOMS report, there are two main factors contributing to vulnerability: the first includes elements directly related to the individual themselves; that is, it covers the situations where individuals may lack full or partial decision-making capacity, education, resources, power or other attributes needed to protect their own interests. The second factor encompasses environmental elements rather than the person himself or herself; that is, the conditions they live in, the impacts they are exposed to, and the lack of sufficient sensitivity or carefulness from others in protecting their interests. When individuals are stigmatized or subjected to social exclusion or prejudice for various reasons, the possibility of others intentionally or unintentionally putting them at risk increases (CIOMS, 2016). According to Akpınar (2018), different characteristics that make individuals more vulnerable than other individuals can exist at the same time. Examples of these conditions, which can vary depending on the context, include illiteracy, social marginalization, and living in an oppressive environment.

The word vulnerable derives from the Latin word "vulnus" (Eng: wound) and is used to describe vulnerability to non-physical attacks. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun form of "vulnerability" as "the fact of being weak and easily hurt physically or emotionally." While "vulnerable person" is defined as "one who needs special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect" (Oxford English Dictionary,

2020). In the Declaration of Helsinki, some groups and individuals who may be more likely to be wronged or incurred additional harm by researchers are described as vulnerable (Akpınar, 2018). According to the guideline published by the Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) in 2002, individuals who are unable to give consent due to mental illness, junior or subordinate members of a hierarchical group (medical students, nurses, hospital employees), the elderly persons or employees, residents of long-term care facilities, the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, migrants, prisoners, refugees, those with incurable diseases, political/ethnic minorities, seriously ill patients, and women and children due to various cultural influences are defined as vulnerable.

When the definitions were examined in general, it is seen that the concept of vulnerability focuses on an individual's capacity to endure suffering, and thus these definitions are based on the "ontological vulnerability" approach. However, nowadays, the concept of vulnerability is widely used to symbolize a disadvantage or particularity, contrary to the ontological approach, and is thus used to express specific groups and individuals within these groups (Çelik, 2020). In any case, it is clear that individuals to be identified under vulnerable groups have a vulnerability based on physical, psychological, or socioeconomic factors. Therefore, these groups are at a high risk of exploitation and are in danger of being harmed due to their personal and risk factors (Goodin, 1985).

In Türkiye, one of the vulnerable groups whose economic balances were disrupted and whose activities were interrupted during the Covid-19 pandemic is the Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Worker (SMAW) families and the children in these families (TEDMEM, 2021). SMAWs in Türkiye are among the vulnerable groups due to inappropriate living conditions, long working hours, risks such as exposure to agricultural pesticides, and limited access to essential human rights services such as healthcare (Development Workshop, 2018; Uysal et al., 2016). The economic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (such as disruptions in supply chains, cessation of production in certain sectors, decreasing

household incomes due to unemployment, and restrictions on public spending diverted to healthcare expenditures) have brought about many changes in living conditions of SMAW families. SMAW families, who had difficulties in ensuring their children's access to and continuity in quality education due to working and living conditions even before the pandemic; In pre-pandemic conditions, most people leave their cities of residence in March and April and migrate to another settlement where there is work. This migration process takes an average of 5-8 months, and it may take until November for families to return to their permanent settlement (Uysal et al., 2016). Due to this life and work cycle that does not coincide with the academic calendar, hundreds of thousands of school-age children who are forced to migrate alongside workers are forced to drop out of school before the end of the academic year and join the process with a delay in the next academic year, depending on the end date of migration. Moreover, the children of Turkish and immigrant (especially Syrian) families may also remain out of school due to reasons such as language barriers, lack of documentation and identification, gender-related barriers (such as girls aged 12 and above being deprived of their right to education due to reasons like working in household work or taking care of siblings), social exclusion, problems with access to school/transportation due to the long distance between residential areas and tent areas, the absence of a suitable education program for migrants, or working in fields/gardens (Dedeoğlu, Bayraktar & Çetinkaya, 2019; Istanbul Bilgi University Center for Migration Research, 2020; Uysal et al., 2016).

Vulnerable groups struggling with existing vulnerabilities in the natural life cycle are seen to suffer further deepened wounds in their economic conditions and the access of children in the households to education due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Yıldız & Vural, 2020). Although strategies have been developed to increase access to education for all children both in the world and in Türkiye, it is not known how effective these strategies are in providing equal access to education for every child. It is emphasized in various studies and reports that this situation, which poses a risk of increasing



and deepening inequalities in access to education services, should be monitored and supported (Alpago & Alpago, 2020; Arı & Kanat, 2020; ILO & UNICEF, 2020). From this point of view, this research examined the educational status of SMAW families and their children, one of the vulnerable groups in Türkiye, under pre-pandemic conditions and the access to educational services of children in the households during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## METHOD

### Purpose and Research Questions

This study was based on the education part of the project entitled “Study on COVID-19 Pandemic’s Effect”, which was conducted in 2020 by the Development Workshop Cooperative with the support of UNICEF to understand how children in SMAW households living in tent settlements in Adana, Mersin and Şanlıurfa were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in social, economic, educational and psycho-social aspects.

With the anticipation that the children of SMAW families, who already face numerous disadvantages regarding their access to, and/or sustainability, in education, will find it increasingly difficult to hold onto education during the Covid-19 pandemic, and that this situation could potentially contribute to an increase in child labour in the long term, this study examines the educational status of adults and children in SMAW households and their access to educational services during the Covid-19 pandemic. This situation research study was conducted by separately examining both from the perspectives of SMAW family representatives and school-aged children. The aim is to determine the current situation of education-related issues emerging or deepening due to the Covid-19 pandemic among children in SMAW families. The research questions for this purpose are as follows:

- What were the educational status of adults and children in seasonal migrant agricultural worker (SMAW) households living in temporary tent settlements in Adana, Mersin, and Şanlıurfa provinces before the Covid-19 pandemic?
- How were school-aged children’s access to educational services during the Covid-19

pandemic from the perspectives of adults and children in seasonal migrant agricultural worker (SMAW) households living in temporary tent settlements in Adana, Mersin, and Şanlıurfa provinces?

### Research Design and Instruments

This study is designed according to the mixed research method, which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative tools. Mixed methods research is more than a simple combination of qualitative and quantitative methods; it involves the use of qualitative and quantitative strategies in a complementary manner, allowing for a better understanding of the data that each method alone would provide (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). The current study was conducted in two main stages. The first stage is based on desk research and covers monitoring studies on seasonal migrant agricultural work and the access of children in these households to education worldwide and in Türkiye, starting from March 2020 and continuing until 2022. In the second stage of the study, the overall framework, methodology, study areas, and data collection tools were determined based on desk research and monitoring studies, and field research was conducted in September 2020. Before the field research, the research team conducted a pilot study in August 2020 in Adana and Mersin provinces to prepare for the fieldwork.

Official data on seasonal migrant agricultural workers and their families working in agricultural production in Türkiye is limited. Therefore, the households and temporary tent settlements included in this study were determined using purposive sampling technique based on relevant literature, data obtained from the pilot study, and the budget/time constraints of the study. In this stage, the “Current Status Map of Temporary Tent Settlements of Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Workers in Adana Province” completed by the Development Workshop in 2020 was used as a basis (Development Workshop, 2020b). The criterion for selecting tent settlements for face-to-face survey application was to have more than 50 households in the tent settlement. During the selection of temporary tent settlement areas, no distinction was made between households who are citizens of the Republic of Türkiye and those who are not.

Five data collection tools were utilized for the field research in accordance with the research methodology:

### **Face-to-face survey application**

A survey form containing basic demographic information and questions related to the research objectives was developed by the researchers. Considering the characteristics of the target population, the survey form was administered to the participants face-to-face by interviewers. Each question was read aloud to the participants, and their responses were coded into the survey form by the interviewers. The focus of the face-to-face survey application was on the households of seasonal migrant agricultural workers living in tent settlements in Adana and Mersin provinces, who have children aged between 5 and 17 years. The survey was conducted in a total of 26 temporary tent settlement areas within the districts of Karataş, Yüreğir, Seyhan, and Yumurtalık in Adana, and within the boundaries of the Tarsus district in Mersin. The survey was administered face to face between September 3rd and 11th, 2020 to a total of 219 household representatives (134 women and 85 men aged 18 and above who were capable of providing information at the household level), comprising 159 Turkish and 60 Syrian households. The average age of the household representatives was 39.54. From the face-to-face administration of the surveys with the 219 household representatives, demographic information of a total of 1561 individuals residing in the surveyed households was compiled.

### **In-depth interviews A**

Based on the findings obtained from the face-to-face survey application, certain households were identified to obtain in-depth data aligned with the research objectives, and in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals in these households. In these selected households that participated in the face-to-face survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with four different household members, including the mother, father, and one boy and one girl aged between 14 and 17. Between September 7th and 11th, 2020, a total of 57 in-depth interviews were conducted in 20 households, including four Syrian households. These interviews were conducted

by academic experts of the research in temporary tent settlement areas including Karagöçer (Adana/Karataş), Köylüoğlu (Adana/Seyhan), Yeniköy (Adana/Yüreğir), Yeşilköy-Kaldırım (Adana/Yumurtalık), and Konaklar (Mersin/Tarsus).

### **In-depth interviews B**

During the desk research phase of the study, it was identified that some families who worked as seasonal migrant agricultural workers did not go to work during the Covid-19 pandemic. To investigate the access to education of children in households of seasonal migrant agricultural workers who did not work during the pandemic, these households were also included in the research. In Viranşehir district of Şanlıurfa, 20 individuals (13 women, 7 men) residing in households where no work was undertaken during the pandemic were interviewed in-depth between September 14th and 17th, 2020. Face-to-face survey forms were not administered to these households.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

To provide firsthand data and understand the problems and perspectives of children aged between 8 and 17 living in temporary tent settlements in Adana and Mersin where face-to-face surveys were conducted, four focus group discussions were held between September 7th and 11th, 2020. A total of 20 children participated in these focus group discussions (9 boys and 11 girls). The average age of boys participating in the focus group discussions was 10.4, while it was 10.5 for girls. Focus group discussions were conducted in the tent settlements of Köylüoğlu (Adana/Seyhan), Yeniköy (Adana/Yüreğir), Yeşilköy-Kaldırım (Adana/Yumurtalık), and Konaklar (Mersin/Tarsus).

### **Key Person/Institution Interviews**

Within the scope of the current study, interviews were also conducted with key individuals and institutions from various fields such as teachers, academics, local authorities, professional organizations, and representatives of civil society to gather their experiences, expertise, opinions, and suggestions. The selection of these key individuals and institutions was based on "The Connection Network of Actors of Seasonal Migratory Agricultural Labour" report published by the Development Workshop in 2020

(Development Workshop, 2020c). In this context, a total of 25 interviews were conducted between September and October 2020.

The target groups for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which were used to obtain qualitative data in the research, were selected from among the households that participated in the survey. Thus, an attempt was made to develop a comprehensive understanding of the households interviewed within the scope of the research questions. These households were determined at the end of each research day based on the evaluations made by the research team. The areas where the field research was conducted, the data collection tools, the number of participants, and the participant profiles within the scope of this study are summarized in Table 1.

### Data Collection and Ethical Permission

Before starting the field study, the face-to-face survey form developed by the research team for the purposes of this study was piloted in Adana and Mersin provinces in August 2020 to minimize possible errors such as containing expressions that may be difficult to understand or lead. Based on this pilot study, corrections were made to the survey form, and the field study plans were updated by determining the completion time of the survey in line with the pilot study.

Following the pilot study, the research team prepared an orientation program for the interviewers who would conduct the main data collection activities. This program aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives, the tools and contents to be used, how the tools would be implemented, how responses would be coded, potential problems that may arise during fieldwork, and how to address them, the research timeline, and ethical considerations. The entire research team in the field (interviewers, experts, etc.) received training on individual precautions against Covid-19 and was briefed on relevant health and safety protocols by a qualified doctor before the start of the research. This ensured that the fieldwork was conducted in a safe and responsible manner, taking into account the health and well-being of both the participants and the fieldworkers.

During the field study, daily evaluations were conducted with the participation of research team leaders to ensure coordination between the survey interviews and in-depth interviews. The survey interviews were reviewed daily, and after the completion of the research, data entry and verification were conducted under the supervision of the research team leaders. For the quantitative data collection of the research, interviewers were involved in implementing the survey questionnaire, while for the qualitative data collection, including in-depth

**Table 1: Data collection tools, number of participants, areas, and participant profiles**

Data Collection Tools	Number of Participants	Areas	Participants
Face to Face Surveys	219 household representatives	Adana and Mersin	Seasonal migrant agricultural workers living in temporary tent settlements.
In-Depth Surveys A	57 persons	Adana and Mersin	Household members including fathers, mothers, and boys and girls aged between 14 and 17.
In-Depth Surveys B	20 persons	Şanlıurfa	Seasonal migrant agricultural worker households representatives who decided not to work due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
Focus Group Discussions	20 persons	Adana and Mersin	Focus group discussions with boys and girls.
Key Person and Institutional Interviews	25 key person/institution	Adana, Mersin and Şanlıurfa	Interviews with key persons and institutions.

interviews, focus group discussions, and interviews with key individuals and organizations, researchers within the research team directly conducted the interviews.

The planning and implementation process of the research was conducted in accordance with research and publication ethics principles. The study was carried out under the research permission obtained from the Koç University Ethics Committee on August 20, 2020. To all participants who voluntarily participated in this study, it was explained that the principle of confidentiality would not be violated, the data obtained would never be used for purposes other than scientific research, and that the researcher would control it at every stage. In addition, the names of the participants were not taken, and care was taken not to make any descriptions that would reveal their identities.

### Limitations and Solutions

Considering the constraints of research schedule, budget, and human resources, and taking into account that the research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, certain quotas were determined for the number of both quantitative and qualitative interviews, and these predetermined quotas were reached without any problems in the field research.

At the time of the study, the research team followed the warnings stated in the “Measures to be Taken for Protection from Covid-19 in the Provinces Where Seasonal Agricultural Workers Will Go to Work” guide by the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Türkiye. Throughout the field study, the research team’s body temperature was measured and recorded regularly in the morning and evening, sufficient hand disinfectant was kept in vehicles, double masks were used in the interviews, and masks were provided to those who had face-to-face interviews. During the fieldwork, Covid-19 antibody tests were performed on the field research team at regular intervals.

During the peak agricultural production season, when the working members of households were in the fields or gardens, breaks or evening hours in nearby work areas were utilized for interviews with working household members. To conduct the survey,

two research teams were formed, and they were encouraged to remain mobile throughout the day to reach suitable households. Since it was known that Syrian households would be encountered during the field study, two interviewers whose native language is Arabic were included in the field research team. These interviewers also contributed as interpreters during in-depth interviews conducted with Syrian households.

It is important for children participating in focus group discussions to express their real thoughts without feeling any pressure. Therefore, before the group discussions, the participating children were engaged in brief conversations, informed about the purpose of the study, and encouraged to participate voluntarily. Icebreaker games and warm-up questions were used to help children feel comfortable both within the participant group and in front of the experts. Questions were prepared and asked in a short, clear, and understandable manner suitable for the age groups of the children. A sequence ranging from simple to complex questions was followed. Since focus group discussions naturally involve high levels of group interaction, an environment was provided where participants could freely express themselves.

### Data Analysis

In the research, the “SPSS 15.0 for Windows” package program was used to analyze the quantitative data obtained through the survey form, and f and % values for the quantitative findings were given. Descriptive analysis was preferred in the analysis of qualitative data. The descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of the qualitative data of the study because it allows qualitative data to be organized according to the themes revealed by the research questions and to be presented by taking into account the questions or dimensions used (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). In this technique, categories were determined by first taking into account the questions in the interview form, each participant was given a certain code and their opinions were examined, and the opinions were coded and analyzed thematically in line with the research problems and the literature.



## Validity and Reliability

According to the criteria in the literature, there are some precautions to increase the credibility, transferability, and consistency of studies using qualitative research methodologies and to ensure their validity and reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, the measures taken within the scope of validity and reliability are as follows: Opinions of field experts were consulted in the development of data collection tools for data that would be obtained through different sources and different tools (survey form, in-depth individual interviews, etc.). Content and data collection tools were piloted with the relevant target group before each application, and data collection tools were updated in terms of scope, comprehensibility, usability, and implementation strategies based on the data obtained. Content analyses of data obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted by at least 2 independent researchers. The consistency of thematic coding and analyses was evaluated by inter-rater correlation ( $r = .91$ ).

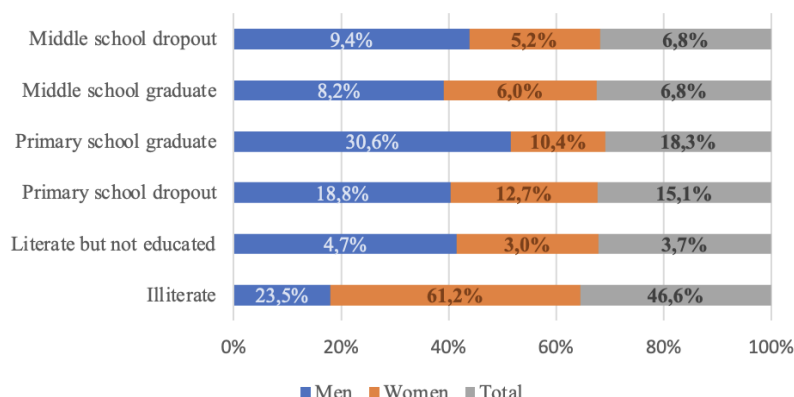
## FINDINGS

### Educational Status of Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Worker (SMAW) Adults and Their Children

A face-to-face survey was conducted with 219 household representatives in Adana and Mersin provinces to collect demographic data on 1561

individuals living in these households. The findings were summarized according to the demographic characteristics (age, gender, and education level) through household representatives in some cases, while in other cases over the members of these households in general. According to the findings, almost half (46.6%,  $n=102$ ) of the surveyed 219 adults representing households were illiterate (Figure 1). The illiteracy rate was higher among women compared to men, and 61.2% ( $n=82$ ) of the women household representatives interviewed were illiterate. According to the survey findings, only 18.3% ( $n=40$ ) of the household representatives were primary school graduates. In terms of gender, 30.6% ( $n=26$ ) of male and 10.4% ( $n=14$ ) of female household representatives were primary school graduates. The rate of primary school dropouts was 15.1% ( $n=33$ ). The rate of continuing education after primary school was quite low for both men and women.

In the in-depth interviews with a total of 20 adults (13 women and seven men) in 15 SMAW households in Şanlıurfa province, who could not go to agricultural labour due to the Covid-19 pandemic and thus remained in the region where they reside, it was observed that nine of the 13 women had never attended school (69%), only three were primary school graduates (23%), and one person dropped out of primary school in the fourth grade (8%). Four of the men in the interviewed households had never attended school (57%), one was a primary school graduate



**Fig. 1: Distribution of educational status of household representatives in Adana and Mersin provinces by gender and total number of participants**

Notes: A woman high school dropout, a man high school student, a man high school graduate, a man college graduate, a woman university student and a man university graduate are not included in the graph.

(14%) and two were middle school graduates (29%). In other words, it can be said that the educational status of SMAW household representatives in Şanlıurfa province, who could not go to agricultural labour during the Covid-19 pandemic, is similar to those in Adana-Mersin provinces where they could go to work.

According to the findings on 1561 household members obtained from household representatives who participated in the survey study in Adana and Mersin provinces, when the educational status and dropout status of the adults in the households were analyzed, it was seen that 11% (n=171) of SMAW adult household members dropped out of primary school and 9% (n=141) dropped out of middle school. There was only one person who attended high school and/or university.

In in-depth interviews with adults in households identified in line with the findings of the survey conducted in Adana and Mersin provinces, the participants were asked how long they had attended school. During the interviews, it was determined that 10 out of 18 women had never attended school. It was found that the women who were able to attend school were able to continue until the sixth grade at most. When the reasons for women's dropping out of school were analyzed, it was seen that women mostly dropped out of school due to financial impossibilities and gender-based reasons; the reason underlying financial impossibilities was that they start working to contribute to the household income and cannot afford education expenses due to poverty, while the factors underlying gender-based reasons were the widespread belief that girls should not be educated and early marriage.

*"At that time, there wasn't even a mention of school at home. It never came up. Due to poverty, it never became a priority."*

In Şanlıurfa, as in Adana and Mersin provinces, most women (12 out of 13) cited gender-based reasons as the most common reason for dropping out of school.

*"In the village, they said, 'It's a girl, it's shameful, why are you going to school?'"*

Among the reasons for dropping out of school, early marriage, working to financially support the family, language barrier (inability to speak Turkish),

and the notion of educating only the eldest child in the household were also mentioned.

*"They used to send one person from each house to school. They made the eldest one of us go to school."*

In in-depth interviews with men, all adult men except one Syrian agricultural worker stated that they went to school. It was observed that most men were primary school graduates, while the rest were middle school graduates. Among the reasons for dropping out of school, men cited financial constraints as the first reason and safety as the second. As in the case of women, most of the men stated the main reasons for dropping out of school as poverty and contributing to household income. In addition to the poverty of the individuals, deprivations such as the lack of schools in the areas where the households live were also noteworthy. The security-related reasons of adult men were based on social phenomena such as war, terrorism and blood feuds.

*"We inherited poverty, my father was poor when I was in primary school. I dropped out of school and started going to the fields to support him. Now my children are living the same story."*

In Şanlıurfa, as in Adana and Mersin, half of the men stated that they dropped out of school in order to contribute to the family budget. The rest stated that they could not complete their education due to family indifference, poverty and the absence of a school in their area.

*"When I was studying, I went to school and worked as a shepherd simultaneously. You cannot continue school like this...."*

Through a face-to-face survey conducted with SMAW household representatives, data was collected on the educational status of 742 school-age (5-17 years) children (50.7% boys, 49.3% girls). According to the findings, the number of school-age children in a SMAW household varied between 4 and 6. Of the 238 children (130 boys, 108 girls) in the 5-9 age group in SMAW households, almost half (n=106) were primary school students (Table 2). There are slightly more primary school-age boys than girls. When the data on 317 children in the 10-14 age group (152 boys, 165 girls) was analyzed, it was seen that there were 127 children who were middle school students

in accordance with their age group. When those who were middle school students in accordance with their age group were compared in terms of gender, it was observed that they were close to each other. When the educational status of 187 children in the 15-17 age group was analyzed, it was observed that the proportion of both boys and girls who were high school students was quite low compared to primary and middle school students.

According to the findings obtained from the household representatives who participated in the survey in Adana and Mersin provinces, it can be said that adults in SMAW households generally participate in education mostly at the primary school level, with women lagging behind men in terms of participation in education (Table 2). When the school attendance of school-age children in SMAW households was analyzed, it was observed that individuals who were in formal education after 1997, when 8-year compulsory primary education was introduced, graduated from primary school or left school later. This finding can be interpreted as the positive effects of 8-year compulsory basic education on disadvantaged communities.

When the age range of school-age children who are not connected to school was analyzed, it was seen that they were mostly between the ages of 5 and 9 (n=108) (Table 2). Of these, 40.8% were boys and 50.9% were girls. According to the survey data,

62 of the 108 children live in Turkish households, while 46 live in Syrian households. Considering the high rates of preschool education and primary school attendance in Türkiye in general, the low rate of attendance of children between the ages of 5 and 9 in SMAW households is striking. According to the interviewed households, the Covid-19 pandemic was cited as one of the most important reasons for this situation. It is thought that the ongoing uncertainties regarding the resumption of face-to-face education at the time of the study, as well as the economic difficulties that households had to cope with during the pandemic period, and the anxiety of families that they would not be able to work in case of a possible contagion caused delayed school enrollment or decreased participation rates in education. In-depth interview findings also support this inference.

When the gender distribution of children of school-age (children/youth aged 10-14 and 15-17) who are out of school was analyzed, it was observed that the number of out-of-school girls was higher than boys in both groups, and that the proportion of out-of-school girls was higher than boys as age increases (Table 2).

The reasons for children not attending school despite being of formal education age were analyzed separately for boys and girls (Table 3). All answers given by the parents who participated in the survey regarding the reasons why their children do not

**Table 2: Distribution of school-aged children aged 5-17 in households in Adana-Mersin provinces who are not affiliated with school and who go to school according to their age group by gender**

School-Aged Groups		Children Who Are Not Affiliated With School			Children Who Go to School According to Their Age Group			Total Children in the Age Group
5-9 age group (primary school)	f	53	55	108	64	42	106	238
	%	49,1	50,9	100	60,4	39,6	100	32,1
10-14 age group (middle school)	f	11	20	31	63	64	127	317
	%	35,5	64,5	100	49,6	50,4	100	42,7
15-17 age group (high school)	f	9	12	21	18	11	29	187
	%	42,9	57,1	100	62,1	37,9	100	25,2
Total	f	73	87	160	145	117	262	742
	%	45,6	54,4	100	55,3	44,7	100	100

participate or continue their education were taken into consideration in the evaluation. Accordingly, regardless of nationality and gender, the main reason for children not attending school was that children have to work due to low family income. This was the primary reason for both Turkish and Syrian children. While school expenses were the second most important reason for boys and girls from Türkiye to stay out of school (25.7% and 20.7%, respectively), the second most important reason for Syrian boys was the problem of transportation to school (19%). For Syrian girls, social exclusion (15.7%) ranked second. For Turkish children, their families' perception that they are not interested in school and education was the third reason that kept them out of school, while for Syrian boys, social exclusion (17.5%) and for Syrian girls, transportation problems to school and the obligation to work at home were the third reasons.

It was seen that the underlying reason for children of both Turkish and Syrian SMAW households not attending school, regardless of gender, was poverty and deprivation. Apart from poverty, transportation

to school and social exclusion were critical reasons for Syrian households. The findings can be considered as an indicator of the fact that the children of Syrian households have not been integrated into the education system, even though supporting household income and poverty seem to be at the forefront. In-depth interviews with Syrian households revealed that children who attended school in Syria could not continue their education after coming to Türkiye, and children born in Türkiye could not start school due to identity registration issues, health problems, and financial constraints.

*"Both of my school-age children have glass bone disease. One of them could not go to school because he was already being treated, and we could not enroll the other one this year because of the virus. I receive disability support for both of my children, but this year it decreased. I don't know why it decreased... We took out ₺5000 loan from the bank. Then we borrowed money to pay off the loan..."*

One of the main reasons for children of SMAW households not attending school, which was

**Table 3: Reasons for Turkish and Syrian children in Adana-Mersin provinces not attending school or being unable to attend school**

Reasons Why Children Do Not/ Cannot Continue Their Education	Turkish Boys (%)	Turkish Girls (%)	Syrian Boys (%)	Syrian Girls (%)
Having to work/contribute to family budget due to low household income	41,9	36,0	36,5	33,7
Not being able to cover school expenses due to low household income	25,7	20,7	15,9	10,8
Having to work in housework (Sibling Care, Elderly Care, Cooking, etc.)	-	6,3	-	12,0
Having transportation problems to school	3,8	7,2	19,0	12,0
School absence due to their family's engaging in seasonal agricultural work	6,7	7,2	11,1	9,6
Social exclusion (due to ethnicity, poverty, etc.)	2,9	2,7	17,5	15,7
Gender-related issues (such as not allowing girls to enroll in school, etc.)	-	9,0	-	-
Lack of interest in school/education	15,2	9,9	-	4,8
Other	4,0	0,9	-	1,2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0



supporting the household income, coincides with the findings of the question “Do your children work? What are the reasons for this?” in the same survey. The first and second most common reasons given by adults in SMAW households for why their children work are contributing to the family budget (55,8%) and helping to pay off debts of the family (25,1%) (Table 4).

**Table 4: Reasons why children in SMAW households in Adana-Mersin provinces work**

The Reasons Why Children Work	f	%
Contributing to the family budget	120	55,8
Helping to pay off debts of the family	54	25,1
Covering school expenses	11	5,1
Not continuing their education	9	4,2
Having free time in summer breaks	8	3,7
Being with their parents while they work	8	3,7
Desire to work themselves	5	2,3
Total	215	100,0

When the reasons for the employment of children were analyzed by gender, contributing to the family budget was 99.2% among boys and 96.4% among girls, while helping to pay the family’s existing debts was 44.6% among boys and 45% among girls. While the first and second reasons for girls’ and boys’ work were the same, the third and fourth reasons differed by gender. The third-ranked reason for girls’ working was “because they were not continuing their education” by 10.8%, while the fourth-ranked reason was “children being with their parents while their parents work” by 9.9%. Among boys, the third-ranked reason was 9.1% covering school expenses, while the fourth-ranked reason was 7.4% “because they did not continue their education”.

Survey findings and in-depth interviews with household representatives showed that the most important factor that causes children of SMAW households to leave education and work is financial constraints. While financial constraints leave children

with no other option but to work in order to contribute to the household budget, children who were eager and willing to continue their education were also forced to work due to the inability of their families to meet their education expenses. In addition, the social exclusion that children from Turkish and especially Syrian households experience at school was also a reason for absence in the short term and dropping out of school in the medium term. In addition to these, security problems in the living environment caused families to take their children with them to the fields and gardens during work, and it was observed that children who are together with adults in the working environment start working overtime. While these findings pointed to the barriers that prevent school-age children from participating in education, efforts to address these barriers will also be instructive in preventing child labour.

While analyzing the reasons why children of SMAW households are not working, the adults in the households whose children are not working were asked the question “If you have children between the ages of 5-17, why are they not working?”. They answered as “children are not employed by agricultural intermediaries and/or field owners because they are too young”. When the reasons for not employing children were analyzed, two main reasons came to the fore: the first and most common reason was that young children are not preferred by employers, agricultural intermediaries or field owners because they are not productive enough, and the second reason was that employers or agricultural intermediaries avoid employing young children within the framework of legal regulations on child labour, or believe that young children should not be employed.

### Children Access to Education Services During the Covid-19 Pandemic from the Perspectives of Adults and Children in SMAW Households

According to the findings, 69,4% (n=152) of adults in the interviewed households and 73% (a=11) of adults interviewed in Şanlıurfa province stated that their children attended school before the Covid-19 period.

In the in-depth interviews conducted with children attending school in Adana and Mersin provinces, it

was observed that girls and boys answered differently the question about the difficulties they experienced in their educational life. Girls mostly expressed their difficulties as peer bullying (37.5%) and low motivation and desire to continue their education (37.5%). Two of the interviewed girls (two sisters from the same household) stated that they had not experience difficulties before and that the difficulties started with the Covid-19 pandemic:

“We did not have any difficulties in Şırnak. We could go to school regularly. The difficulties started with the pandemic.”

The reasons for the low desire and motivation of girls to continue their education often revolved around the difficulties they face due to seasonal migration and the resulting changes in their schools. On the other hand, for boys, exams tend to be the main concern.

Both household interviews and in-depth interviews revealed that children’s motivation for school and education is quite low. This is important as these are factors that increase absence and dropout rates in the long term.

Children who participated in the focus group interview (n=16) were also asked about the difficulties they experienced in their educational life. The findings revealed that children experience peer bullying, lack of transportation to school, security problems at school (loss/theft of belongings), and communication problems with their teachers.

“Some of my friends treat us badly, make fun of me and imitate me.”

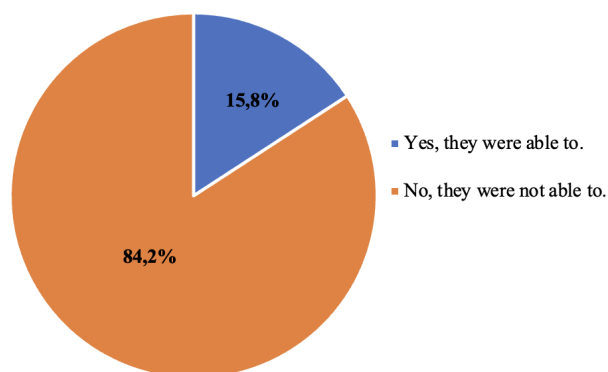
In in-depth interviews, children were asked how they cope with these difficulties. Half of the girls stated that they could not cope with the difficulties, while the other half stated that they coped with the difficulties with the help of their teachers. While most of the boys were hesitant to answer this question, one of the boys who responded to this question stated the following:

*“I try as hard as I can. There is a boy across the street (pointing to the tent settlement on the other side of the water canal...) who got into science high school. Everything is possible if we try.”*

In focus group discussions, one-third of both girls and boys stated that their first solution to cope with

such difficulties was to ask for help from their friends, pointing to the importance of peer support.

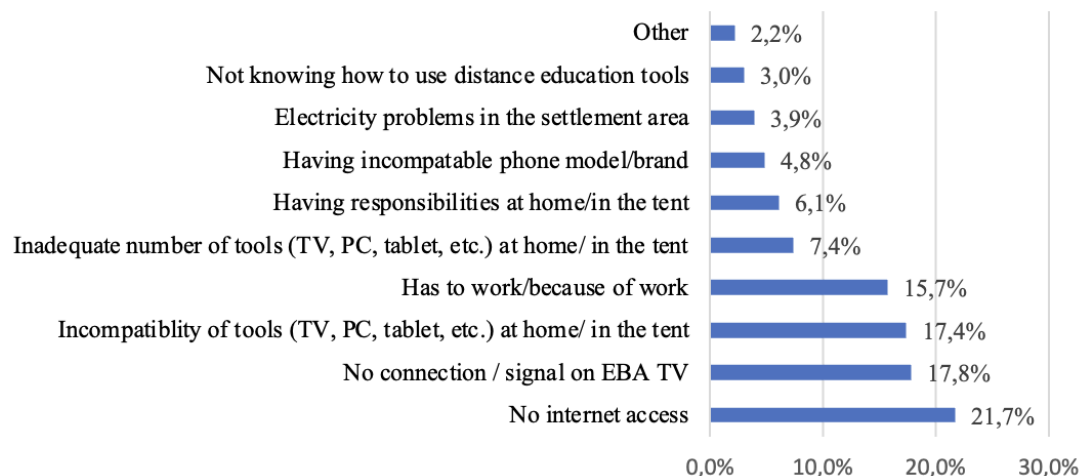
In interviews with household representatives in Adana and Mersin provinces, only 15.8% of 152 households whose children were in education before the pandemic stated that their children were able to follow distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 2.).



**Fig. 2: Participation of the children of SMAW families who continued their education before the covid-19 pandemic to distance education as of march 2020 (%)**

When parents of the children who were able to follow distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic period were asked which technological tool and which distance education platform their children mostly followed education with, the answer of Education Information Network (EBA) TV ranked first with 69% and television in general ranked second with 60% (more than one answer of the participants was evaluated). The use of smartphones and the internet-based EBA digital education platform was quite low.

Since there is only one smartphone in the household and it is owned by the father of the family, many children were forced to follow distance education only through television. When the reasons for children’s inability to follow distance education were analyzed, the first reason was the internet access problem with 21.7%, the second reason was the lack of connection or signal on EBA TV (17.8%) even if they have a TV in their tents, and the third reason was not having compatible technological tools (TV, tablet, computer, etc.) for distance education (17.4%). Of the children who attended school before



**Fig. 3: Reasons why children cannot follow distance education (%)**

the Covid-19 pandemic, 15.7% could not attend school because they had to work due to obligations arising with the pandemic (Figure 3). According to the findings obtained from in-depth interviews, it is very difficult to say that children who were able to follow distance education had an efficient course follow-up.

In the in-depth interviews conducted with parents in Adana and Mersin provinces, most of the parents (80%) responded to the question “How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect your children’s education?” and stated that their children could not continue their education due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

*“Our children’s education was already infected, and we are to blame. It is because of us that they are condemned to this fate.”*

Two households whose children were able to follow distance education stated that their children’s academic achievement decreased, and one household stated that their children’s social interactions decreased. When parents who stated that their children were able to follow distance education were asked about their children’s distance education experiences, it was observed that only in one household, children were able to follow distance education efficiently, while children in other households were able to follow distance education partially or occasionally due to technical reasons.

It was observed that the children of Syrian households did not continue their education even before the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore left the

questions about distance education unanswered. The main reasons for Syrian children not continuing their education included having to leave their countries due to the war, financial difficulties, not being able to enroll in school after arriving in Türkiye due to lack of identity cards, and those who were able to enroll dropping out of school due to social reasons such as peer bullying, language problems and marginalization.

*“They need a school so they can study, money to cover expenses and clean clothes so they are not looked down upon by their friends.”*

In Şanlıurfa, almost all of the parents who were asked about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their children’s education stated that their children were behind in education due to financial and technical impossibilities.

*“They never followed distance education. There is no internet. They fell behind in school programmes.”*

*“When the virus arose, school was over.”*

*“The children have been at home for three months, but I am afraid they have forgotten even how to read and write.”*

*“There’s only one TV at home, black and white. Half of the screen is not visible.”*

During in-depth interviews in Adana and Mersin provinces, the most common responses of households to the question of what they need for their children to follow distance education were lack of technical tools and equipment (computers, phones, televisions, tablets, etc.) with 43% and access to infrastructure

(internet, network lines, electricity, etc.) with 18%. In addition, lack of information and deficiencies in the students' working environment were also mentioned.

In Şanlıurfa province, television and the internet were the most important tools that households responded to the question of what they need for their children to follow distance education. In the second place, tools such as computers, phones and tablets were mentioned.

*"There's one TV at home but EBA TV does not work..."*

*"I have a tablet, one tablet without internet."*

In in-depth interviews, television was the first need mentioned by both households and children to follow distance education. This is an indication that the perception of distance education is limited to EBA TV. It was seen that live EBA lessons and internet-based simultaneous distance education applications, which are known to have more interaction and impact, were less common among the expectations of children of SMAW households.

*"So many children tried to watch lessons, but it didn't work out. There was even fighting among the children about who would watch. One says 'I'll watch', the other says 'No, I'll watch'. There are three kids after all. Are you going to watch it, or am I?"*

*"They used to go to school five days a week, 9.00-14.00. If they attend distance education, it's only one hour a day. Is one hour okay for quality education?"*

Research findings revealed that the most important barrier for children of SMAW families to access education during the Covid-19 pandemic was access to distance education tools. This finding caused various institutions and organizations to take action during the pandemic. During the interviews with the representatives of Adana, Mersin and Şanlıurfa Provincial Directorates of National Education, it was learned that the Ministry of National Education had collected instant data from relevant institutions and teachers using online data collection tools at the start of the pandemic period and assessed access to education, especially for disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. In light of the data obtained, it was learned that preparations were started to be made to increase access to education

by establishing EBA support points (mobile and fixed) as of September 2020, especially to overcome the lack of technical equipment. However, since the data collection phase of this study was completed in September, the utilization of EBA support points by the children of SMAW families could not be examined within the scope of this study.

In in-depth interviews with children, when asked "How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected your education?", almost half of both girls and boys stated that they could not go to school due to the suspension of face-to-face education. In addition, one-fifth of the girls stated that they did not have access to distance education; one child complained that she had already started not going to school before the virus, and another complained about falling behind in lessons because she could not follow distance education. One child said that she tried to follow distance education on television for a week, but was unable to continue because she was working in the fields.

Some of the boys also stated that they did not find distance education useful, that distance education was not like face to face education and that they could not ask questions to the teacher;

*"My brother watches TV now, but when he doesn't understand, he can't ask questions. It's not good."*

*"Most students do not understand distance education at all. Human emotion is not reflected as it is in the classroom environment. Let's say I had a question in my mind, I couldn't ask the teacher. The lesson ended there, it was wasted."*

*"We were affected by the virus, the disease came and schools were closed. We looked at the TV, but we didn't understand. I didn't understand some lessons at all. Schools were closed and we couldn't study. We fell behind in our lessons. We had a hard time, school was closed for us."*

*"We used to go to school easily, but now we don't know if we will be able to go to school. I used to be happy at school, but now we cannot study, we are bored."*

In-depth interviews revealed that school-age children lost contact with the school or their teachers during the distance education period. Almost all of the girls interviewed stated that they could not follow distance education.



*"We couldn't follow the lectures at all. All four (siblings) of us are studying, so we couldn't all follow the lectures. We gave priority to the one who was going to take the High School Entrance Exam. Sometimes we all watched his lecture too. We didn't understand anything in 20 minutes anyway."*

Only one girl mentioned that she mostly followed her lessons on TV but found it very difficult not being able to ask questions to the teachers. The reasons girls couldn't follow distance education were cited as not having televisions, not having the turn to use the single television in the tent, not having a study environment, having to work in the field, and not knowing what distance education was.

*"The teachers didn't call and say anything. You need a quiet environment to be able to follow remotely. 'I need a life where I don't work.' Even if I don't go to work now, as long as I'm in the tent, I can't do anything. If there was a house, I would go to a separate room. It's noisy here."*

Of the boys, only two stated that they were unable to follow distance education in any way, while the others mentioned that they followed it partially. The two boys who mentioned being able to follow partially stated that they initially watched the lessons but stopped because they couldn't understand what was being taught. Another boy mentioned that he was only able to follow the lessons when his father wasn't using the phone for work. Only one of the boys interviewed stated that he watched live lessons during March-April 2020, and then occasionally watched EBA TV afterwards.

*"I watched it all on TV for the first 1.5 months. Imagine I didn't even understand my favorite lesson."*

As evident from the children's statements, the transition to distance education due to the pandemic was not inclusive; it continued with significant disparities among children in terms of content, accessibility, and timing. This situation did not adequately support children in continuing their education and meaningful learning. The absence of parents or adult caregivers to assist with homeschooling, coupled with the interruption of communication between adults in SMAW households and the children's teachers - which was already

limited - during the pandemic, are factors that support the potential disengagement of these children from education.

Among the 219 households that participated in the survey conducted with household representatives, 53.9% (n=82) of 152 households whose children continue their education said that teachers and/or administrators from their children's schools contacted them during the pandemic period, while 46.1% (n=70) stated that they were not contacted (Table 5). In-depth interviews with households also revealed that half of the girls and boys attending schools in the households answered "no" to the question "Were you able to communicate with your teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic?"

Among the 152 households whose children continued their education, 53.9% (n=82) reported that teachers and/or school administrators contacted them during the pandemic, while 46.1% (n=70) stated that there was no communication (Table 5). In-depth interviews with households also revealed that half of the girls and boys attending school in the households answered "no" to the question "Were you able to communicate with your teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic?"

**Table 5: The communication status of teachers or any school employee with SMAW families or children during the distance education period in Adana and Mersin provinces**

Communication Status with SMAW Families or Children	f	%
Yes, I was able to communicate with my teachers.	82	53,9
No, I was not able to communicate with my teachers.	70	46,1
Total	152	100,0

In in-depth interviews with girls, it was observed that nearly half of the girls had lost contact with their teachers. Similarly, boys also reported difficulties in communicating with their teachers. Among those who managed to communicate with their teachers during the pandemic, the communication was primarily limited to one-way information transfer from teacher to student through WhatsApp groups. All Turkish

children participating in the focus group stated that they had not spoken to or been able to communicate with their teachers after March 2020.

*"I didn't have my teachers' phone numbers. Even if I wanted to ask something, how could I reach them? I guess they didn't have our phone numbers either. They didn't call."*

*"To be honest, the teachers did call and explain what the children needed to do. I leave for work at five in the morning and return in the evening. I have to have my phone with me, I can't leave it with the children. After a while, I started ignoring the calls too because we can't do what the teacher says. I know I'm wrong, it's my fault."*

According to the survey findings, in households with children of formal education age, 45.7% (n=100) do not have anyone to help the children with their lessons, while only 23.7% (n=52) of households have someone to help the children with their lessons (Table 6).

**Table 6: Assistance at home/tent with schoolwork of children attending school (%)**

The Presence of Individuals Assisting with the Schoolwork of Children Attending School in SMAW Households	f	%
Yes, someone is assisting.	52	34,2
No, there is no one assisting.	100	65,8
Total	152	100

When the individuals assisting the children with their lessons in these households were examined, it was observed that sisters or elder sisters assist their siblings the most (56.3%; n=36). Brothers accounted for 18.8% (n=12), mothers for 12.5% (n=8), and fathers for the least percentage at 9.4% (n=6) in terms of helping with the lessons (Table 7).

It can be argued that the lack of meaningful communication with their teachers or school administrators during the distance education process, coupled with the absence of someone at home to assist them with their lessons, may negatively affect students' interest and motivation in education, thus creating a barrier to continuing their education. Children who do not receive sufficient support from their parents for their lessons at home during

**Table 7: Distribution of household members assisting children with their lessons (%)**

Distribution of Household Members Assisting Children with Their Lessons	F	%
Sister	36	56,3
Brother	12	18,8
Mother	8	12,5
Father	6	9,4
Relatives	2	3,1
Total	64	100,0

distance education, coupled with the interruption of communication with their school and teachers, may be pushed towards child labour due to increased poverty during the pandemic period. When combined with the decrease in children's desire and motivation for education, this situation could lead to a permanent increase in child labour in the long term.

*"Without opening more schools, the more we work in the fields, the less I want to go to school."*

The prediction above is supported by the survey findings, as 32.4% (n=71) of the 219 households reported that their children had to start working for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic period (Table 8). Consistent with the findings obtained from interviews with household representatives, in-depth interviews with children also revealed that one-third of the children started working in agricultural production for the first time during the pandemic period. This highlights the importance of education in preventing child labour, and underscores that without developing necessary support mechanisms to increase school attendance, it is inevitable that children who started working during this period will eventually drop out of education.

**Table 8: In households children's engagement in work during the Covid-19 pandemic period**

Engagement of Children in Work during the Covid-19 Pandemic Period	f	%
Yes, started working.	71	32,4
No, did not start working.	148	67,6
Total	219	100

The interviews conducted with teachers who work in Adana-Mersin provinces and there are children from seasonal agricultural worker households in their classrooms, supported the findings above. According to interviews conducted with these teachers working in the region (4 teachers in total), all of them reported that their communication with the children from SMAW households in their classrooms almost completely ceased during the pandemic. They mentioned that around 50% of the students registered before the pandemic started being absent from school by the end of February 2020 and the beginning of March 2020. During the pandemic, only a maximum of one student was actively participating in live classes, while the others disconnected from the process, even leaving WhatsApp groups.

## CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before the pandemic, Turkish and Syrian SMAW families were lodging in tents they set up themselves along roadsides and/or riverbanks. However, between March and November, when agricultural production is intense, they migrate with their families from the areas where they live to other regions or cities, and children are also included in this migration process. Many school-aged children are usually separated from their schools between March and November due to either their families' migration to agricultural areas or their own involvement in work. In addition, during this period, especially girls are unable to attend school because they have to take care of their siblings or work in housework.

Research findings show that the obstacles experienced by children of SMAW families, who were already one of the vulnerable groups with many disadvantages in all areas of life before the pandemic, especially in access to and/or continuity in education, have deepened with the Covid-19 pandemic, posing long-term risks of dropping out of education and increasing child labour. This finding is consistent with the joint report of ILO and UNICEF in 2021, titled "COVID-19 and Child Labor: A Time of Crisis, A Time to Act," which warned that millions of children in vulnerable groups may be pushed into child labour due to the pandemic, and that this year

could see a global increase in child labour for the first time after 20 years of progress. The most important reasons for this can undoubtedly be explained by the fact that the pandemic creates situations that disrupt economic balances and increase vulnerability (disruption of supply chains, cessation of production in some sectors, decrease in household incomes as a result of unemployment, restriction of public expenditures shifted to health expenditures) and schools give a break to the face-to-face education as part of pandemic measures. The findings of this study are in line with the findings in the literature on the barriers to access to education for children of SMAW families, such as absenteeism due to mobility, academic failure, financial impossibilities, working to contribute to the family budget, transportation and social problems (exclusion, peer bullying, etc.), and working in housework (Development Workshop, 2018; Uyan Semerci, Erdoğan, & Kavak, 2014; Uysal et al. 2016).

Children experiencing difficulties in accessing and attending education within the context of deep poverty and seasonal migration dynamics show an increase in school absenteeism and dropout rates, especially as their age and education level increase. It is observed that school dropout rates begin to rise, particularly at the middle school level. Local actors play a crucial role in ensuring school attendance and preventing dropout. Therefore, it is believed that strengthening agricultural intermediaries and enhancing their capacity to collaborate with teachers in areas close to the living environments of SMAW households are necessary for monitoring children in these households and supporting their participation in education.

The research findings reveal that the number of children who were able to continue their education during the pandemic period was quite low, and that many children in these families could not be included in distance education in Türkiye, which progresses through a technology-dependent process due to the emerging needs of the pandemic. The general dynamics (electricity and internet infrastructure problems, etc.) in the temporary tent settlements of the children of SMAW families have revealed that they lack the conditions to meet the basic requirements of distance education such as television, computer and

smartphone. Therefore, in order to involve the children of SMAW families in distance education processes, free Wi-Fi should be provided in tent settlements, educational tools (computers, tablets, TVs, etc.) should be provided to children, electricity should be provided, especially to settlements without electricity, through solar panels, and desks and chairs suitable for children to study should be provided. In this regard, cooperation should be established with local actors, especially local administrations, provincial directorates of national education, and the private sector.

For the children who were able to continue distance education, their distance education experience was limited to only EBATV and the fact that their communication with their teachers was almost completely cut off was not sufficient for a quality learning process to take place. In addition, it has been noted as a significant deficiency that efforts to address educational needs are limited to centralized policies focused solely on academic support, disregarding the urgent need for social and emotional support, which is particularly felt among vulnerable groups such as SMAWs during times of emergency and crisis. The interviews conducted as part of this study indicate the necessity of providing social and emotional support for both girls and boys. In addition to academic support, guidance services should also be provided to meet their social and emotional needs. To facilitate the provision and dissemination of such services, new educational content should be developed and models should be developed to ensure that these children are supported both academically, socially and emotionally through school-based holistic policies. In addition, the discourses in the interviews with children highlights the importance of “success stories” and “role models” of vulnerable groups with similar dynamics, which can enhance motivation towards education by providing peer support.

It was observed that the families interviewed within the scope of the research were anxious and reluctant to send their children to school during the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering the financial constraints and the conditions of the tent environment, the risk of the disease spreading from school to the tent environment, coupled with the reality of lack of health insurance, is particularly

important for families who have no alternative other than “working” within the context of deprivation and poverty. Therefore, these families have stated that even if schools were to resume face-to-face education, they do not consider sending their children to school because they do not have the financial means to tolerate any loss of income that may arise in the event of a potential case.

It is anticipated that with the prolongation of the Covid-19 pandemic and the distance education process, children who cannot access education worldwide may completely disengage from schooling, emerging as one of the primary challenges in the coming years. This situation may lead to an increase in the number of out-of-school children and thus child labour (Balçı, 2020; OECD, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

It seems that future societies will face such mass problems more frequently, and as in all areas, this situation will necessitate a paradigm shift in education as well. Therefore, the requirements arising from the Covid-19 pandemic should be perceived as an opportunity. Especially in the education sector, instead of implementing immediate emergency action plans such as the distance education system, foundations for inclusive and sustainable education, which is pre-planned, supported by appropriate tools and technological infrastructure, prioritizes equal opportunities, inclusivity, and addresses children’s minimum academic and socio-emotional needs, should be laid down.

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