

BRIEFING

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DEVELOPMENT
WORKSHOP

WAGE PROTEST by Seasonal Migratory Agricultural Workers

in Çukurova
September-October 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing note summarizes the wage protest by seasonal agricultural workers that took place in the Çukurova Region (Adana–Mersin–Hatay) between late September and early October 2025. The note is based on consecutive field interviews with labor intermediaries, as well as direct observations and exchanges from the field. The protest was not limited to a simple demand for higher daily wages (yevmiye). It was shaped by multiple underlying dynamics: the shrinking supply of agricultural labor, the organizing function of the intermediary system, the bargaining power of the export-oriented supply chain, and workers' pursuit of recognition and social status. Due to its strategic timing—coinciding with the start of the harvest period for citrus and other crops—the protest led to a noticeable slow-down in product flow, with a decline in deliveries to wholesale markets and retail outlets. A compromise was eventually reached for the 2025 season, setting daily wages at 1,200 TL (USD 29) up from 1,000 TL (USD 24), and a target of 1,500 TL (USD 36.5) for 2026 (exchange rate: 1 USD = 41 TL, 10 October 2025).

Seasonal Agricultural Workers: Key Facts

Under Article 4/b of the Turkish Labor Law No. 4857, most seasonal agricultural workers are excluded from social security coverage and the general provisions of labor law. Wage-setting mechanisms for seasonal agricultural workers vary by region, crop, and the type of agreement between parties, taking several forms such as daily rates (yevmiye), piecework, lump-sum (kabala), per-bag, or per-kilogram payments. In most cases, wages are calculated by dividing the officially announced gross monthly minimum wage by 30 days—or in some regions, by 26 days—and this amount typically includes the intermediary's commission (usually around 10%), transportation, and food expenses.

The main issues related to wages include:

- Net daily earnings often remain below the poverty line.
- Insufficient household income contributes to child labor.
- Regional and occupational wage disparities and work without social security coverage are widespread.
- Agricultural workers lack access to wages that ensure a dignified standard of living.

Source: Wage-Setting for Seasonal Migrant and Local Agricultural Workers,

www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Diger/en_bilgi_notu.pdf



BACKGROUND

It is estimated that nearly one million people in Türkiye work each year as seasonal migrant or local agricultural workers. Under Article 4/b of the Turkish Labor Law No. 4857, these workers are excluded from social security coverage and therefore lack access to basic rights such as insurance, severance pay, notice pay, and paid leave.

According to the Development Workshop Cooperative's 2023 Information Note on the Wage System in Seasonal Agriculture, the sector's key structural problems include:

- daily wages remaining below the hunger and poverty thresholds,
- low household income contributing to child labor, and
- deep regional inequalities in wages and social protection.

These issues resurfaced in October 2025 during the citrus harvest season in the Çukurova Region (Adana, Mersin, Hatay), when workers staged work stoppages. Their main demands centered on decent wages and secure working conditions. Under existing local agreements, gross daily wages were set at 1,000 TL (USD 24), from which a 10% intermediary commission was deducted, leaving workers with a net income of roughly 900 TL (USD 22). Workers called for wages to be increased to 1,200 TL (USD 29) for 2025 and to 1,500 TL (USD 36.5) for the 2026 season, along with improvements in housing, transportation, and occupational safety conditions.

In essence, these demands were not solely economic but also reflected a call for recognition, dignity, and social security. As one worker representative expressed: "I work for this country, but I have no status. We need a legal foundation."

The protests marked a rare instance of large-scale collective action among agricultural workers, with harvest activities largely suspended for ten days. During this period, workers' internal networks of solidarity reportedly strengthened.

Social security remains one of the most complex challenges for seasonal agricultural workers. Most are employed without insurance coverage—not only because of legal loopholes but also due to contradictions within the social assistance system. Many workers avoid formal registration out of fear that social benefits will be cut if they are insured. Although intermediary associations emphasize the long-term benefits of insured employment, this argument often fails to resonate on the ground due to workers' immediate concerns over short-term income loss.

Foreign migrant workers, especially Syrians, generally do not view insurance as a practical benefit, given their legal status and similar concerns about social assistance. This situation reveals that insecurity is not solely employer-driven but rather a structural outcome intertwined with poverty, social assistance dependency, and protection regimes.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This study is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with agricultural intermediaries, observation notes compiled from the field, and data gathered from local media reports. The geographic scope covers the provinces of Adana (Seyhan, Yüreğir, Ceyhan, Kozan), Mersin (Central District, Tarsus), and Hatay (Erzin, Dörtyol). As part of the preparation of this Information Note, additional online consultations were held with representatives of actors involved in the process. The findings presented here therefore reflect the direct perspectives and insights of those interviewees.

TIMELINE

A Demands and Start of the Strike (August–September 2025): In August 2025, agricultural workers formally conveyed their demands to employers, calling for wage improvements and safer working conditions. When no satisfactory response was received, a work stoppage began on 29 September 2025. Participation in the protest increased rapidly over the following days.

Market Impacts (1–10 October 2025): The halt in labor activities quickly produced tangible effects on agricultural production. Reports from the field indicated a significant decline in the volume of produce reaching wholesale markets and retail outlets. This supply shock led to a short-term but sharp increase in product prices and, for some commodities, temporary shortages at the consumer level.

Resolution and Agreement (10–15 October 2025): Mounting pressure on the supply chain prompted both sides to return to negotiations. As of 15 October 2025, the following terms were agreed upon:

- The daily wage for 2025 was increased from 1,000 TL to 1,200 TL.
- For 2026 and beyond, a daily wage of 1,500 TL was committed.

ACTORS AND ORGANIZATIONAL MAP

At the center of the protest was a work stoppage initiated by citrus workers, which soon evolved into a broader act of solidarity as it spread to those involved in winter vegetable planting and cultivation. The key figures organizing the movement in the field were agricultural intermediaries and foremen (çavuşlar), who coordinated daily activities, conveyed demands to employers, and acted as the sole point of contact between workers and producers. On the civil society side, several local and issue-focused associations supported the protest, including the Erzin & Dört Yol Agricultural Workers Association, the Çukurova Agricultural Intermediaries Association, the Tarsus Packaging and Agricultural Workers Association, and GİŞ-DER. On the other side stood producers, farmers, and agricultural trading companies. Negotiations were conducted primarily with the Exporters' Union and individual exporting firms, while the Chambers of Agriculture chose to remain outside the process. From the public sector, the Governor's Offices and Provincial Directorates of Agriculture and Forestry participated mainly through coordination with law enforcement authorities, focusing on maintaining public order and information flow throughout the process.

KEY FINDINGS

Labor supply contraction and strategic timing: During the harvest period, the shortage of available labor and the urgency of crop collection increased workers' bargaining power. The protest was organized in a deliberate and strategic manner.

"Once the harvest began, everyone started looking for workers; when products stopped moving, prices soared."

Dual role of the intermediary system: While the intermediary system perpetuates informality and insecurity, it also functions as the main channel for labor coordination in practice.

"The intermediaries tell us, and we tell the employers. It's like a military chain of command."

Participation and discipline: The proportion of workers who broke ranks and continued working ("unauthorized labor") remained low, with field estimates indicating 90–95% participation—an unusually high level of collective ownership.

"I've never seen a protest embraced this strongly before."

Wage protocol: The wage and working conditions protocol established at the beginning of 2025 had not been directly negotiated by workers or intermediaries; the new agreement emerged at the bargaining table with exporters. The October 2025 protocol, however, was jointly determined.

Demand for social status: Beyond wages, workers sought recognition, respect, and secure employment.

Gender and migrant dimensions: Women's participation, particularly in packaging lines, remained limited. Syrian workers, though less visible, displayed strong and disciplined solidarity.

"Women were more reserved in packaging; their representation must increase."

"Migrant workers share decisions in Arabic-language groups; they stayed disciplined."

Transport and occupational safety risks: Long commutes, unlicensed drivers, and overloaded vehicles continue to pose serious risks for seasonal workers.

Market impacts: A decline in wholesale entries and shelf availability was reported, leading to short-term price spikes and the risk of crops remaining unharvested.

"The Chambers of Agriculture's statement that the fields are empty is not true — the crops are still there."

WAGE SYSTEM AND PROTOCOLS

In the Çukurova region, seasonal agricultural work has long operated under a daily wage system known as *yevmiye*. This system is based on payment per day rather than per unit of output. Each year, as the harvest season begins, workers' and labor intermediary associations, producers, and exporters engage in negotiations to determine daily wage levels.

In the 2025 season, these negotiations evolved into an expression of accumulated frustration among workers over persistently low wages that had been tolerated for years.

WAGE-SETTING MECHANISM

Agricultural workers' wages vary depending on the type of work performed—such as harvesting, picking, packaging, or planting—and the number of days worked. Coordination of work and wage-setting is most often managed through agricultural intermediaries (tarım aracıları), who act as a bridge between workers and producers. As one intermediary explained:

"It's impossible to deal with thousands of workers individually in the field. Intermediaries bring order to the process—they make it easier for workers to find jobs and help producers and traders plan their work and set wages."

This system has long been regarded as an established practice shaping the rhythm of agricultural production. However, the 2025 season began amid a significant contraction in labor supply, driven by rising production costs, a decline in the number of migrant workers, and a growing reluctance among younger generations to engage in agricultural labor.

REGIONAL WAGE DISPARITIES AND WORKERS' DEMANDS

Workers' demands for higher wages were not limited to adjusting for inflation. They were also grounded in comparisons with the average wage levels across Türkiye. In the same line of work, particularly in the Antalya and Aegean regions, daily wages had reached up to 1,600 TL, while in Çukurova they remained between 1,000 and 1,200 TL for an extended period. As one field representative noted:

"It's hard to find jobs in other regions, but the pay is higher. Here, there's plenty of work—but the wages are too low. That's why workers don't stay."

This disparity is shaped not only by differences in living costs but also by the continuity of production in the region. In Çukurova, favorable weather conditions allow agricultural work to take place almost year-round. While this ensures steady employment opportunities, it has also become a factor that effectively balances—or suppresses—the overall income levels of workers.

PROTEST AND NEGOTIATIONS

Wage negotiations that began in August 2025 ended without agreement due to the negative stance of producers and traders. By late September, as the harvest season began, workers who had received no response to their demands refused to go to the fields and orchards. On the morning of 29 September 2025, the work stoppage started in Erzin, Dört Yol, Adana, and Mersin, spreading across the entire region within a few days.

The chain of solidarity extended beyond harvest workers to include those engaged in packaging, planting, and transportation. Although limited exceptions were made in certain crop groups at the request of producers to prevent spoilage, overall compliance across the region remained strong.

Field observations indicated that worker participation this time was far more disciplined compared to previous years. As one association representative described:

“This time, people resisted not just for money, but for dignity. They stayed home for ten days. We didn’t force anyone to stop working, but everyone stood firm.”

NEGOTIATIONS AND OUTCOME

Intermediaries, representatives of workers’ associations, and the Exporters’ Union. The Chambers of Agriculture chose to stay out of the process, citing potential financial losses for farmers.

As a result of the discussions, the workers’ demand for a daily wage of 1,500 TL was partially met—wages were set at 1,200 TL (gross) for the 2025 season, with a commitment to increase them to 1,500 TL at the start of 2026.

This was regarded by workers as a partial but symbolic victory. One field representative summarized the outcome as follows:

“We didn’t reach the number we asked for, but at least we made our voices heard. Now everyone knows that if workers want, production can stop.”

PROTOKOL

Konu: Mevsimlik Tarım İşçileri Günlük İşçi Ücreti

1. Taraf İşçi Temsilcileri
2. Taraf İşveren Temsilcileri

Bu protokol Mevsimlik Tarım İşçilerinin günlük yevmiyelerinin bundan böyle aşağıda bahsi geçen şekilde belirlenmesi hususunun tarafların oybirliği ile karara bağlanarak imza altına alınması amacıyla düzenlenmiştir.

Madde 1 – 01/10/2025 – 31/12/2025 tarihine kadar tarım işçileri ücreti Elcilik payı dahil 1.200,00.- TL (Bin İki Yüz TL)

Madde 2 – 01/01/2026 – 01/08/2026 tarihine kadar tarım işçileri ücreti Elcilik payı dahil 1.500,00.- TL (Bin Beş Yüz TL)

Madde 3 – 01/10/2025 – 31/12/2025 tarihine kadar Paketleme tarım işçileri ücreti Elcilik payı dahil 1.120,00.-TL (Bin Yüz Yirmi TL) , 01/01/2026 – 01/08/2026 tarihine kadar Paketleme tarım işçileri ücreti Elcilik payı dahil 1.375,00.-TL (Bin Üç Yüz Yetmiş Beş TL) , Yatılı Paketleme işçileri ücreti 01/10/2025 – 31/12/2025 tarihine kadar Elcilik payı dahil 1.020,00.-TL (Bin Yirmi TL), Yatılı Paketleme işçileri ücreti 01/01/2026 – 01/08/2026 tarihine kadar Elcilik payı dahil 1.250,00.-TL (Bin İki Yüz Elli TL),

*Derneğe kayıtlı olmayanların bu protokole belirlenen ücretten faydalanamayacaklarına,

* Günlük 8 (Sekiz) saat çalışma prensibi üzerinden anlaşılmış olup, ELCİLİK payı % 10 olarak belirlenmiştir.

İş bu protokol taraflar arasında oy birliği ile karar verilmiş ve imza altına alınmıştır.

Mehmet Celal ŞENATEŞ Çukurova Tarım Aracıları Dernek Bşk. Gülçin HANÇER Ceyhan Tarım, Elciler ve İşçiler Dernek Bşk. Ali Bahadır İNCELER Kozan Mev. Tarım İşçileri Dernek Bşk. Cumali ERBAY Tarsus Paketleme ve Tarım İşçileri Derneği Nurettin ÖZDEMİR Mersin Merkez Güvencesiz İşçiler Dernek Bşk. Şeyhmus AKSOY Dört Yol Mev. Tarım İşçileri Dernek Bşk. Eyüp TAT Erzin Güvencesiz İşçiler Derneği Temsilcisi Bşk. Mesut GÜLER Yatılı İşçiler Dernek Bşk.	Ferhat GÜRÜZ AKİB Yarı Mevsim Sebze YK. Bşk. Süleyman GÖRALP AYMED Bşk. Ramazan BOZDAĞ AKİB Üyesi Yaşar AKPOLAT AKİB Üyesi Bayram ARIDAĞ AKİB Üyesi Oğuzhan ALTUN AKİB Üyesi
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Protocol between the parties on setting daily wages for seasonal agricultural workers.

EFFECTS OF WAGE INCREASE

In the first days of the protest, the halt in fieldwork led to a sharp decline in the supply of citrus products. According to wholesale market records, of the 20 tons of produce expected to reach local markets daily, only 1–2 tons were actually delivered. This caused temporary shortages and short-term price increases in local markets, making visible the previously invisible role of seasonal agricultural workers in the economy. As one field observer noted:

“The crops existed, but they never reached the market. Once the fruit stayed in the fields, everyone realized that the value of labor isn’t just in the daily wage—it’s also reflected in the price on the table.”

Sonuç olarak, 2025 Çukurova eylemi, yalnızca bir ücret pazarlığı değil; tarım emekçilerinin görünürlüğünü ve söz hakkını yeniden inşa ettiği bir süreç oldu. Eylemin ardından yapılan protokol, bölgedeki ücret dengelerini kısmen iyileştirse de, işçilerin talepleri daha geniş bir çerçeveye, güvenceli çalışma, sosyal haklara erişim ve toplumsal tanınma, işaret ediyor.

WOMEN’S AND MIGRANT WORKERS’ ROLES

Çukurova’daki mevsimlik tarım işçiliğinde kadın emeği görünmez ama belirleyicidir. Özellikle ürün paketlenme işlerinde çalışan kadınlar, ürünün son aşamasındaki kalite kontrol ve ayırıştırma süreçlerinde kritik bir rol üstlenmektedir. Ancak bu önem karar alma mekanizmalarına yeterince yansımamaktadır.

In Çukurova’s seasonal agricultural sector, women’s labor is largely invisible yet highly influential. Women working in product packaging play a critical role in quality control and sorting processes during the final stages of production. However, this importance is not adequately reflected in decision-making mechanisms. Field observations during the protest indicated that many women workers were more cautious than men when it came to claiming their rights and showed limited participation in association meetings.

For this reason, structural facilitators that can increase women’s participation are essential such as safe working environments, childcare support, flexibility in shift hours, and dedicated seats for women in negotiation platforms. Including women’s voices in these processes is not only a matter of equality but also a key factor for improving the efficiency and sustainability of the agricultural value chain.

Migrant workers, meanwhile, form the backbone of seasonal agriculture. A significant portion of the workforce consists of Syrian workers under temporary protection. Although they face serious limitations in accessing social rights, they have been actively engaged in organizing and protest activities. Interviews revealed that migrant workers maintained strong collective discipline throughout the protest, promptly responding to announcements translated into Arabic. Their cohesion was crucial for the continuity of the movement. As one observation put it:

“Migrant workers shared decisions through Arabic groups; they stayed disciplined.”

This experience demonstrates that migrant workers should not be viewed merely as a source of cheap labor but as active participants in collective labor struggles. Given their large share in the workforce, improving their working conditions is not only a matter of labor justice but also vital for production continuity and social cohesion.

TRANSPORTATION AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, AND SAFETY (OHS)

In the Çukurova region, many seasonal agricultural workers commute daily from distant locations. While some live in nearby villages or tent settlements close to agricultural fields, a significant number travel long distances each morning from cities such as Mersin, Tarsus, Erzin, and Dört Yol. These trips are often made in minibuses driven by unlicensed drivers, carrying far more passengers than allowed.

Several accidents during the 2025 season — including one on 7 October 2025 in Mersin, where five workers were injured — once again brought the issue of transportation safety to the forefront. The problem, however, extends beyond physical risk. Workers often leave for work before dawn and return home after dark, which increases fatigue and accident risks while heightening safety concerns, particularly for women and young workers.

This situation clearly highlights the need for a regulated transportation system. Key measures should include the creation of authorized and monitored carrier lists, a driver certification system, capacity limits, and a mandatory route-planning mechanism. Under this model, where employers or intermediaries are directly responsible for transportation, accountability would be clearly defined after accidents, ensuring safer and more institutionalized travel for workers.

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Haber > Yaşam > Mersin'de işçi servisi şarampole devrildi: 5 kişi yaşamını yitirdi, 14 kişi yaralandı

Mersin'de işçi servisi şarampole devrildi: 5 kişi yaşamını yitirdi, 14 kişi yaralandı

Mersin'in Erdemli ilçesinde tarım işçilerini taşıyan minibüsün şarampole devrilmesi sonucu 5 kişi hayatını kaybetti, 14 kişi yaralandı.



haber.sol.org.tr/haber/mersinde-isci-servisi-sarampole-devrildi-5-kisi-yasamini-yitirdi-14-kisi-yaralandi-401906

Traffic Accident Involving Seasonal Agricultural Workers in Mersin (October 2025)

On 7 October 2025, a minibüs carrying seasonal agricultural workers to the highlands of Mersin's Erdemli district overturned, resulting in seven fatalities and multiple injuries. A week earlier, on 28 September, another vehicle transporting farm workers in Tarsus district collided with a truck, leaving three people dead and sixteen injured.

These accidents highlight the unsafe transportation conditions faced by seasonal agricultural workers in Türkiye, where overloaded and poorly maintained vehicles, long travel distances, and lack of regulatory oversight continue to pose serious occupational safety risks.

MARKET AND INFLATION LINKAGES

Field data clearly demonstrate a direct relationship between workers' conditions and market prices. When product supply is sufficient but harvesting is delayed due to labor shortages or wage disputes, products enter the market later than planned. This delay affects not only producers but also consumers: shelf prices rise rapidly, and some products become temporarily unavailable.

As one worker representative put it:

"Citrus fruits remain on the trees, but they're missing from the market. Without workers, the products don't reach the shelves. And when they don't, inflation grows."

Bu örnek, mevsimlik tarım işçiliğinin sadece bir emek meselesi değil, aynı zamanda bir gıda politikası ve enflasyon yönetimi meselesi olduğunu gösteriyor. Dolayısıyla, mevsimlik tarım işçilerinin ücretlerinin güncellenmesi, çalışma koşullarının iyileştirilmesi ve ulaşım-barınma altyapısının güçlendirilmesi, yalnızca emek adaleti için değil; gıda arz zincirinin sürekliliği ve fiyat istikrarı için de ulusal düzeyde öncelikli bir politika alanıdır.

RECOMMENDATIONS (for Civil Society Organizations)

1 Strengthening Representation Mechanisms

To make women and migrant groups among seasonal agricultural workers more visible in decision-making processes, direct representative seats should be established within local associations and negotiation committees. These representatives could participate in discussions on wages and working conditions and directly share their experiences. Additionally, a "field representation" model could be piloted in selected regions: one representative could be elected for every 50–100 workers to strengthen information flow among workers, intermediaries, and associations.

2 Pre-Meeting Information Briefs

Public institutions, farmers, and exporters involved in wage negotiations often come to the table without up-to-date information about labor conditions in the field. Therefore, associations should prepare one-page infographics before meetings to illustrate the relationship between labor and production, including data such as product prices, number of workers,

average daily wages, and transportation costs. The goal is to help decision-makers visualize the economic balance on the ground with concrete data and make the negotiation process evidence-based.

3 Monitoring and Evaluation Dashboard

To ensure the sustainability of gains such as wage increases and improved working conditions, regular monitoring should be established. A weekly monitoring dashboard, managed by local associations and professional organizations, could track key indicators such as:

- Volume of produce entering wholesale markets (product flow)
- Shelf availability rates in local markets (supply status)
- Average daily wage levels
- Records of vehicle and transport inspections

Bu pano hem sahadaki eğilimleri görmeyi hem de politika yapıcılarla düzenli bilgi paylaşımını kolaylaştırır.

4 Mapping the Agricultural Intermediary System

The system of labor intermediation in agriculture remains the core coordination mechanism of seasonal agricultural work, yet practices vary widely. Therefore, a regional “agricultural intermediary map” should be developed to distinguish good practices from those that pose risks of abuse. Based on the findings, a training module for agricultural intermediaries should be developed, and a professional standard for agricultural intermediation should be introduced. This module should cover key topics such as wage transparency, social insurance awareness, and occupational health and safety.



[https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/1_1_2_%20Agricultural%20Intermediary%20\(Level%204\)%20National%20Occupational%20Standard.pdf](https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/1_1_2_%20Agricultural%20Intermediary%20(Level%204)%20National%20Occupational%20Standard.pdf)

5 Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Transportation Protocol

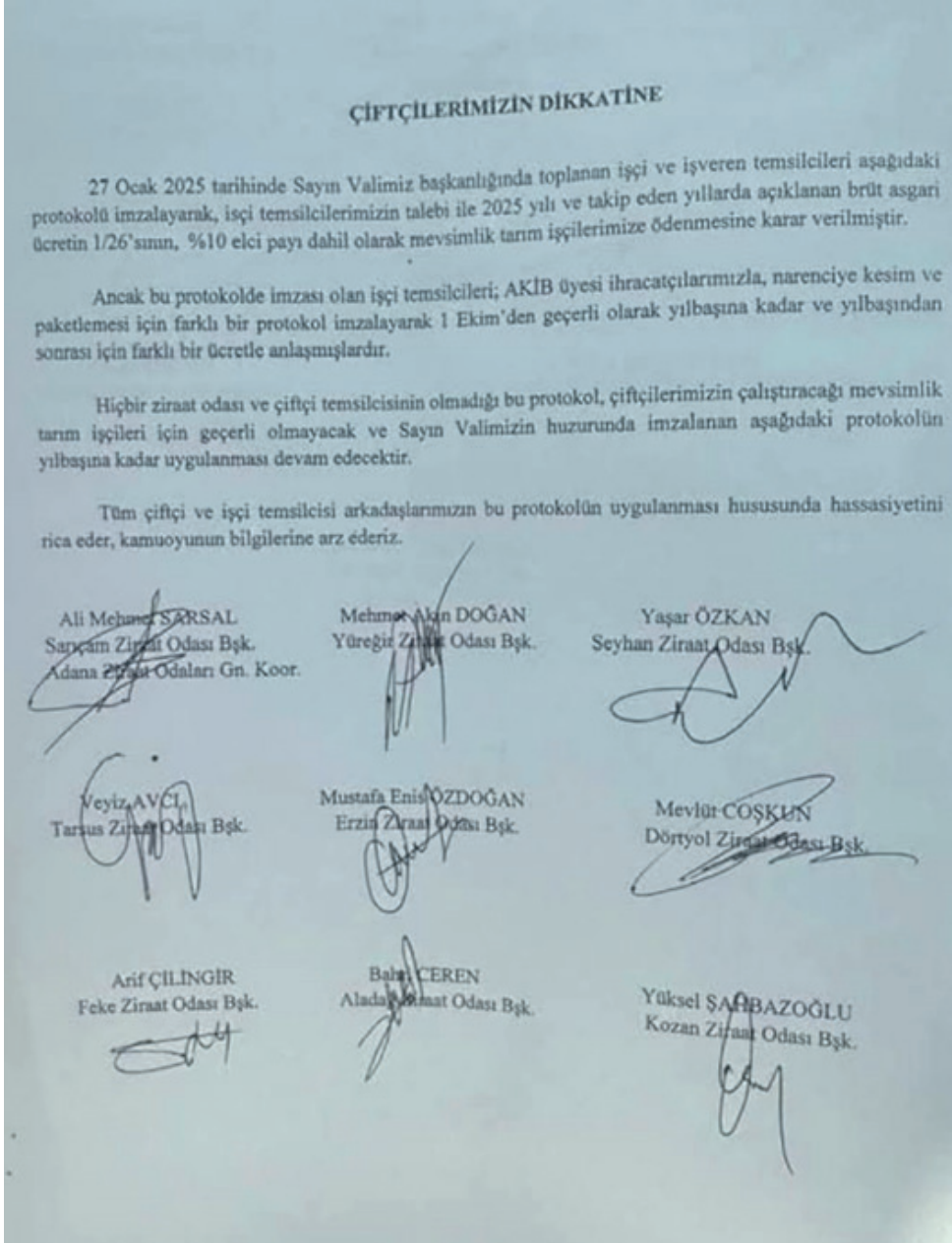
Frequent transportation accidents involving seasonal agricultural workers traveling to fields and orchards highlight the lack of systematic inspection and regulation. To address this, a “Supervised Transportation List” should be established through a partnership between public authorities, civil society organizations, and transport associations. Drivers should be certified, vehicle capacity limits must be defined, and a graduated system of rapid sanctions (warnings, temporary suspension, or license cancellation) should be implemented in cases of violations. This framework would strengthen both worker safety and employer accountability.

6 Tripartite Protocol Design (Wages + Logistics + OHS)

Wage protocols alone have proven insufficient. At the beginning of each season, a tripartite protocol should be developed that integrates wages, logistics, and occupational health and safety. Representatives from the Exporters’ Union, workers’ associations, and relevant public authorities should participate equally in the negotiation process. This would ensure that not only wages but also basic rights such as housing, transportation, and safety are secured collectively.

7 Legal Support and Capacity Building

Local associations in the field often need assistance with preparing complaints, formal applications, and legal petitions, as well as tracking official procedures and conducting correspondence in line with regulations. Past experiences have shown that legal and administrative advisory support provided by national civil society organizations made a significant difference on the ground. This support model should be made sustainable through “legal process and correspondence” workshops for association managers. Such initiatives would both strengthen the institutional capacity of associations and ensure that workers’ demands are expressed on a stronger and more legitimate legal basis.



The advisory decision adopted by the chambers of agriculture in the Çukurova region on January 27, 2025, regarding the daily wages of seasonal agricultural workers.