



DEEP PLATFORM IFRC TURKEY PROJECT

**SECONDARY  
DATA REVIEW (SDR)  
STUDIES SERIES**

**#1**

Economic Participation Of Refugees In  
Turkey In Times of Covid-19:

**Secondary Data Review  
(SDR) Report**

by  
International Federation of Red Cross and  
Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)  
Turkey Delegation

AUGUST 2021

# What?

DEEP is a secondary data library covering all the published information from local and international media, humanitarian and development sector and academia on all the aspects of the lives of refugees living in Turkey. It also provides various analytical tools to summarize and analyze this information so that you can conduct complex Secondary Data Review (SDR) research and create ready-to-go reports, all in one place.

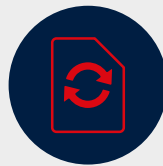
# How?

IFRC staff can use their **IFRC email**, and the password sent to them via email to login to the Platform. Non-IFRC readers please follow the link by [here](#) to request access to the **2021 IFRC ESSN Turkey Project**.

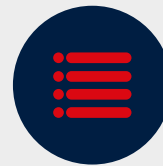
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AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK SPECIALLY TAILORED TO THE TURKISH REFUGEE CRISIS CONTEXT



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DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF REPORTS IN TERMS OF THEIR METHODOLOGIES AND DATA QUALITY

For more information on the IFRC Project in DEEP do not hesitate to reach out to the IFRC Turkey Data Analysis Officer Ebru Eren Webb ([Ebru.WEBB@ifrc.org](mailto:Ebru.WEBB@ifrc.org)) and go to the [DEEP Support](#) page to learn more about the Platform.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CVME	COMPREHENSIVE VULNERABILITY MONITORING EXERCISE
DGPC	DIRECTORATE GENERALS OF POPULATION AND CITIZENSHIP AFFAIRS
DEEP	DATA ENTRY AND EXPLORATORY PLATFORM
DGMM	DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF MIGRATION MANAGEMENT
ECHO	EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS
ESSN	EMERGENCY SOCIAL SAFETY NET
FCG	FOOD CONSUMPTION GROUP
IFRC	INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES
IGAM	ILTICA VE GÖÇ ARAŞTIRMALARI DERNEĞİ/RESEARCH CENTER ON ASYLUM AND MIGRATION
IVS	INTERSECTORAL VULNERABILITY SURVEY
LCSI	LIVELIHOOD COPING STRATEGY INDEX
MEB	MINIMUM EXPENDITURE BASKET
MOFSS	MINISTRY OF FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES
PAB	PRE-ASSISTANCE BASELINE
PDM	POST-DISTRIBUTION MONITORING
RCSI	REDUCED COPING STRATEGY INDEX
TRC	TURKISH RED CRESCENT
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
WFP	WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

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# OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES<sup>1</sup>

There are four million refugees in Turkey<sup>2</sup>, living side by side with the host community, taking an active part in the same economy, formal and informal, both as employers and employees (UNHCR, 2021). IFRC Turkey, in close partnership with the TRC, contributes to their livelihoods in a major way thanks to the part it plays in the implementation of the ESSN Programme and other migration-related activities implemented to support refugees living in Turkey (IFRC, 2021). The purpose of this study is to gather and synthesize knowledge from different sources regarding the participation of refugees in economic activities in Turkey.

This study is the first of a series of Secondary Data Review (SDR) studies, as indicated in the name of this type of product, the SDR based studies do not rely on data collected by IFRC and TRC only<sup>3</sup>, nor does it offer an in-depth analysis of primary data conducted in the name of IFRC Turkey or TRC. Instead, SDR products compile important external and internal findings about the refugee groups living in Turkey produced and published by sources including the local and international media, NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies and academia, working both within and outside of Turkey. As a result, the data -, analyses and findings shared in these SDR studies do not reflect the views of the IFRC as an institution, whose role within this context is limited to a provider of systematized information on an important topic such as the refugee crisis situation in Turkey.

Specifically, this SDR study aims to provide a snapshot of the current situation for refugees within the Turkish economy by combining, summarizing and contrasting findings of the latest available research, produced by both the humanitarian sector and the academic institutions. This study does not only compile the findings of this research but also compares them with similar research to triangulate their validity and to check their

reliability. There is a wide variety of research on the topic of refugee economic integration in Turkey, produced both by the humanitarian agencies from Turkey and from other countries and academia on the topic of refugees living in Turkey and their economic situation. This SDR report primarily utilizes studies that represent the majority of refugee groups in Turkey and excludes the studies that are project-specific or specific to a certain geographic part of Turkey. Since as of the time of this report's publication about 90 percent of these refugees are also Syrian (UNHCR, 2021), some studies that focus on this ethnic group are also covered despite the fact that the experiences of non-Syrian refugee groups can be significantly different than the Syrians.

The secondary data collection and analytical development tool behind this SDR Report is an interagency led initiative known as the Data entry and exploration platform (DEEP<sup>4</sup>). DEEP is an intelligent web-based platform offering a suite of collaborative tools tailored towards humanitarian crisis responses. It includes common analysis workflows and frameworks for thinking using both structured and unstructured, quantitative and qualitative data. By using a customizable analysis framework, users can easily catalogue information contained in large amounts of documents and export it to a variety of formats. Although the platform is meant to be a collaborative space, it is open-source and available to be deployed in private server environments. Data in DEEP is visible only to users granted access to a project space and is stored using modern web technology standards.

1 It is important to note that the research findings presented here as well as the insights that can be driven from them do not always necessarily reflect IFRC's position. They are chosen in this study purely due to their methodological rigor and their potential to inform the humanitarian sector, which works to support the vulnerable refugee communities living in Turkey. This report is drafted by Ebru Eren-Webb.

2 <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2021/07/UNHCR-Turkey-Operational-Update-June-2021.pdf>

3 Please note that the IFRC and TRC based PDM and IVS data statistics used and shared in this study uses these data aggregated at national-level instead of ESSN beneficiary and non-beneficiary level of the refugees living in Turkey as it is usually done in other IFRC and TRC publications. National level sample does not involve, thus does not represent, the refugee households living in Turkey who have never applied to the ESSN Programme including the unregistered groups as well as those who live in informal type of settlements such as the informal seasonal workers living in tents. Nevertheless, this limitation of the samples in question is not a major limitation considering the fact that these communities are a very small percentage within the refugee population, and they can safely be assumed to be systematically different from the rest of the community because they are either much less vulnerable than the rest leading them to not even consider applying for ESSN or they are much more vulnerable than the rest that they cannot afford a permanent residency.

4 For more information on how to use DEEP, please follow the link below:  
<https://deephelp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/categories/360000874911-DEEP-User-Guide>

# Economic Situation of Turkey under COVID-19 Conditions

At the time of issuing this report in August 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic is still a major determinant of the socio-economic dynamics in both Turkey and across the globe. This remains true even as the pervasiveness of the pandemic diminishes due to increasing vaccination rates and the global economic rebound. Accordingly, it is important to understand how this key event has affected Turkey and the refugees living in Turkey, both directly and indirectly. In Turkey, from 3 January 2020 to 17 August 2021, there have been 6,096,816 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 53,324 deaths, reported to WHO. As of 9 August 2021, a total of 76,029,390 vaccine doses have been administered (WHO, 2021)

**Turkey COVID-19 Cases and Deaths as of August 2021 (WHO, 2021)**

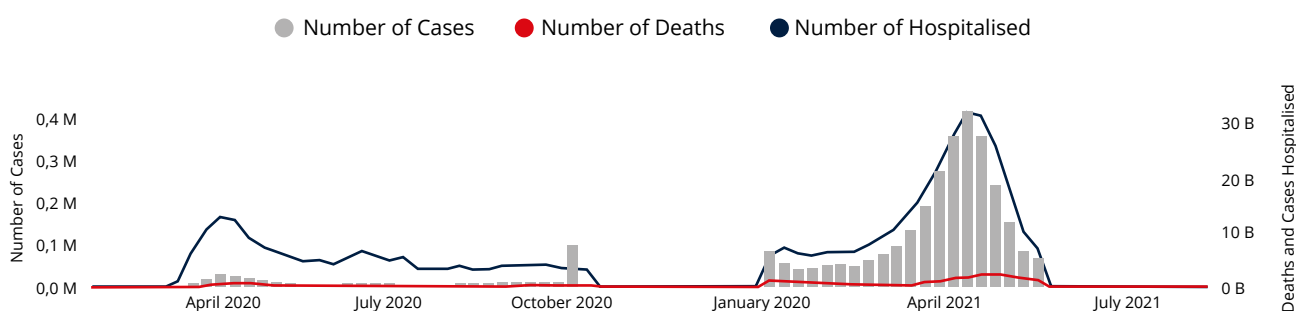


Figure 1

**COVID-19 Containment and Health Index of Turkey (WHO, 2021)**

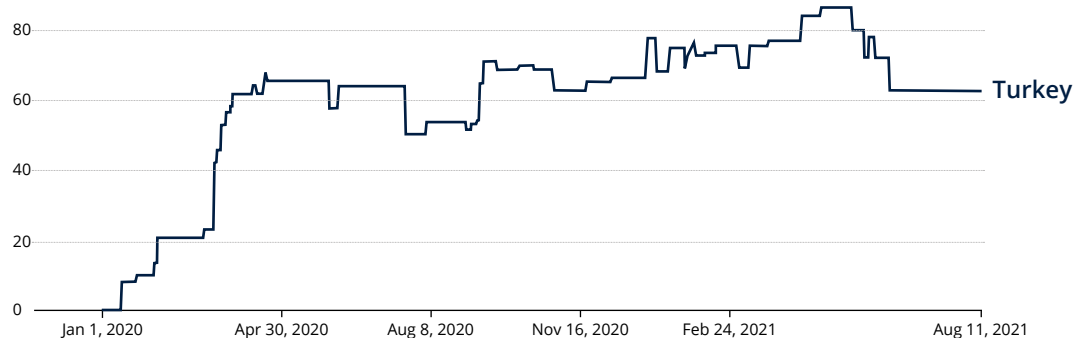


Figure 2 - Source: Hale, Angrist, Goldszmidt, Kira, Petherick, Phillips, Webster, Cameron-Blake, Hallas, Majumdar, and Tatlow (2021). "A global panel database of pandemic policies (Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker)." *Nature Human Behaviour*. Last updated 17 August 2021, 16:50 (London time) [OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus](https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus) • CC BY

Regarding the containment measures of Turkey, Figure 2 illustrates the evolution in the level of strictness of governmental policy responses. This index composites health security indicators including school closures, workplace closures, travel bans, testing policy, contact tracing, face coverings, and vaccine policy, all measured from the beginning of the pandemic and rescaled to a value between 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). As of August 2021, Turkey's containment and health index is at around 61 percent out of 100 (Our World in Data, 2021).

According to the April 2021 edition of the Turkey Economic Monitor (TEM7) by the World Bank, policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact led to a sharp return in economic activity in the second half of 2020, making Turkey one of the few G20 countries with positive growth in 2020. Taking account of quasi-fiscal measures to support credit, Turkey's stimulus program was larger as a share of GDP (gross domestic product) than the average of G20 emerging market countries. But this growth came with rising inflation, falling international reserves, a weakening of the Lira, a sharply expanded current account deficit, and increasing corporate stress (World Bank, 2021). Inflation gradually accelerated, to reach an 18-month high of 16.2 percent by March 2021. The value of Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) of a 6-person household has increased from 2,292 TL in April 2020 to 2,598 TL in January 2021.

### Inflation rates in Turkey (World Bank, 2021)

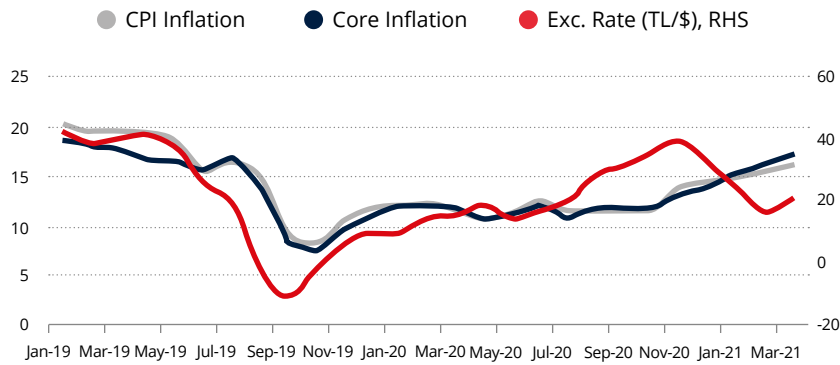


Figure 3

The number of working hours fluctuated greatly during 2020 due to high unemployment rates, as calculated by the International Labour Organization using TurkStat statistics from the state (ILO, 2021). According to these findings, from February to May 2020, the number of working hours have gradually decreased. The percentage of decrease was lower during the summer months and began to increase again beginning from November. Following a similar pattern, the percentage of decrease was higher among women compared to men and reached around 12 percent in April. The reason for this difference is that women work in sectors that require face-to-face interaction relatively more, such as cleaning, patient care and service industries (Ibid, pg. 7).

### Working Hour Losses due to Covid-19 trends in Turkey (ILO, 2021)

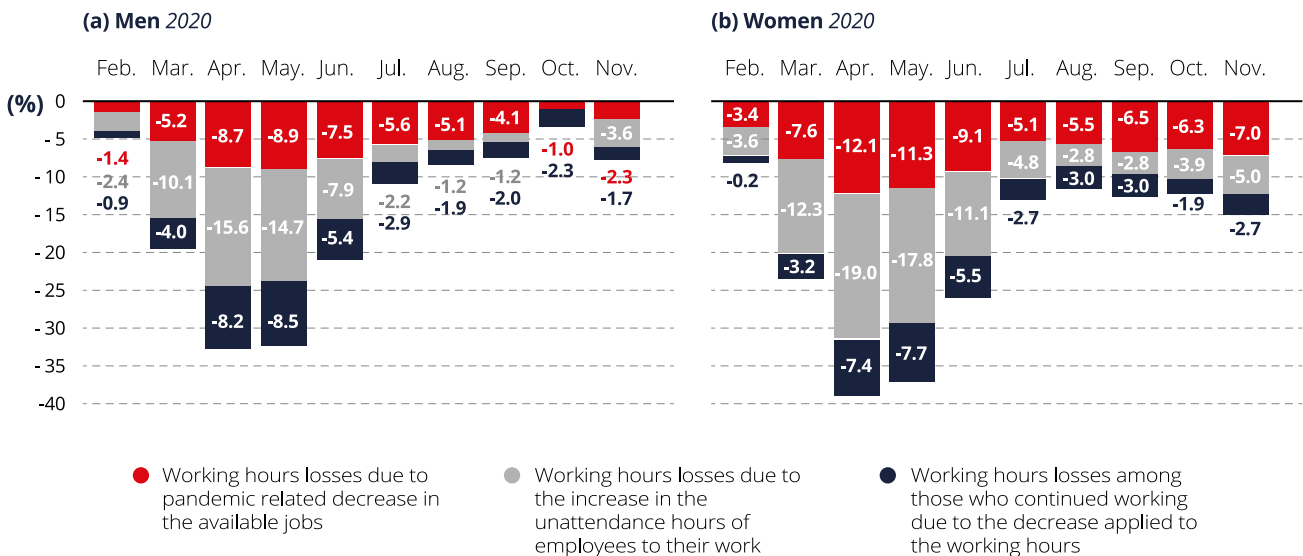


Figure 4

Job losses compounded existing labour market disparities. In December 2020, there were 2.3 million losses of employment recorded, with the greatest loss of employment in the service sector. The sectors of health, agriculture and manufacturing were exempt from COVID-related restrictions; hence the COVID-related shutdowns did not cause as much loss of employment for people working in these sectors (ILO, 2021). While overall the labour market saw a good recovery towards the end of the year, the recovery among female, youth, lower-skilled and informal workers lagged behind. This asymmetric recovery exacerbated existing disparities as expected because the informal and unskilled workers are always among the most vulnerable of all the working groups everywhere in the world, making them more susceptible to the negative changes in the labour market during times of crisis like COVID-19. Informal workers also did not benefit from the recovery measures applied to the formal industries by the government, as illustrated in Figure 5 (World Bank, 2021, iv).

## Labour market recovery (World Bank, 2021)

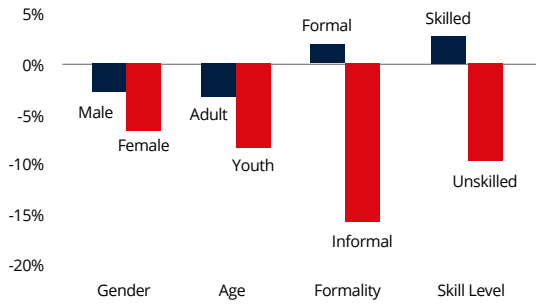


Figure 5 - Percentage change in employment (year on year to November 2020)

MEB is about 17 percent more than rent with food costs being around 40 percent and rent being around 23 percent. As for the total MEB for a six-person household per province, Istanbul is at 4,338TL, closely followed by Izmir and Bursa, going all the way down to 3,146TL in Hatay, with a 27 percent decrease (Figure 6).

The MEB averages that has been discussed so far are representative of an average family living in Turkey. However, when host community and the refugee community MEB costs are considerably different from each other, which translates to a 23 percent difference between the host (3,499TL) and the refugee (2,680TL) households of six (Figure 7). Though the difference between the two groups does not seem to change much over time, the total cost for both groups has been increasing all throughout the 18 months covered, with a higher rate of increase around October 2020 to January 2021 and a slower rate both before and after this period. According to the Quarter 1, January-March 2021 Market Bulletin of WFP Turkey, The MEB costs 576 TL per person per month as of March 2021, representing a 4 percent increase as compared to previous quarter and 14 percent increase from March 2020. In March, the inflation rate reached 16.2 percent. Despite going down in Q1 2021 the food inflation rate was actualized at 17.4 percent, leading to decreased loss of purchasing power. Cost of living increased more in the South-eastern and Eastern regions than the other locations and metropolitans as of March 2021 as compared to March 2020. The minimum wage increased from 2324 TL in 2020 to 2826 TL in 2021, yet it is still 22 percent less than the average MEB.

According to the TUIK statistics, as of June 2021 Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) in Turkey per capita is 623TL, which adds up to 3,502 TL for a six people household (IFRC and TRC, 2021). Component-wise, food expenditure is the highest portion of this price with 1,422TL, making up 41 percent of the total MEB, followed by rent with 29 percent with an average of 1,422TL, utilities with 11 percent with an average of 399TL and non-food items costing on average 318 TL making up about 9 percent of the MEB. This distribution does change slightly depending on the region with some relatively higher differences between the Istanbul and the Southeast regions for the food vs. rent costs. For June 2021, while everywhere else food costs are about 10 percent more than rent, for Istanbul, they are the same each with 34 percent, and for Hatay and Mardin food's portion within

## Minimum Expenditure Basket by Province, June 2021 (IFRC and TRC, 2021)

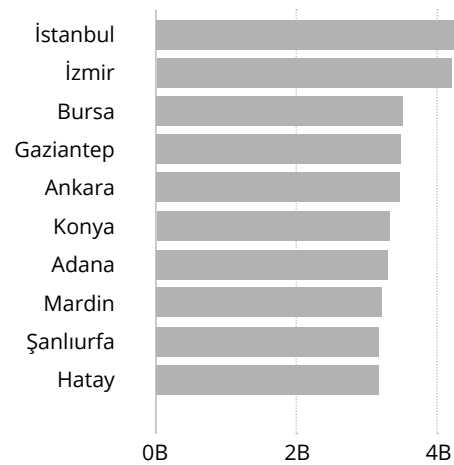


Figure 6 - Total Amount by Location



**Minimum Expenditure Basket for Refugee vs. Host 6 Person Households, January 2020 to June 2021 (IFRC and TRC, 2021)**

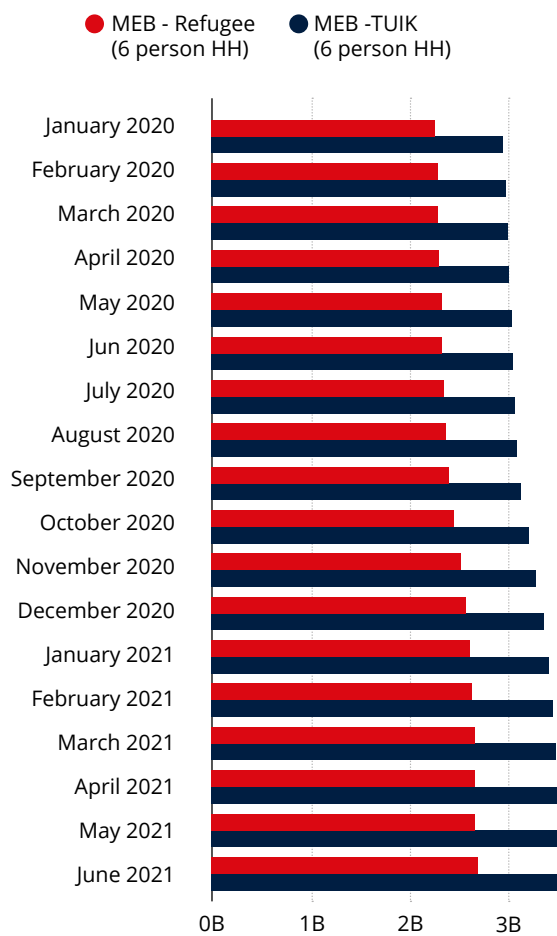


Figure 7

The minimum cost of essential needs has increased by more than 40 percent since 2018 in Turkey. According to the latest published Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM)<sup>5</sup> Report of 2020 by IFRC Turkey and TRC, 45 percent of refugees live below the World Bank's poverty line, while 7 percent live below the extreme poverty line (IFRC and TRC, 2020). On the other hand, according to the findings of the first round of the Intersectoral Vulnerability Survey<sup>6</sup> (IVS), 10 percent of all refugee households support a person with special needs (IFRC and TRC, 2021). All participants of the FGD study conducted on the impact of the COVID-19 situation on their livelihoods reported that the pandemic has affected their work, income, social life, and their children's education (IFRC and TRC, 2020). Most lost their main source of income during the pandemic and for at least three months. Families have started to rely on debt to cover their basic needs drastically over the past year to cope with the rising costs. While the Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise (CVME) Round 5 reported that 53 percent of households borrowed money (WFP and TRC, 2020), this figure was reported as 82 percent in the PDM 10 survey (IFRC and TRC, 2020). , this figure was reported as 82 percent in the PDM 10 survey (IFRC and TRC, 2020).

According to the March 2021 report of ILO on the COVID-19 policy implementations of the Turkish government, the economic climate will continue to have a significant impact on the refugee population in Turkey, with the depreciation of the Turkish Lira against the USD coupled with increasing inflation rates. This climate unavoidably diminishes the purchasing power of the refugee groups residing in Turkey, while also further decreasing their livelihood opportunities as the labour market reacts to the economic downturn (ILO, 2021).

5 As one of the most important and comprehensive studies, Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) survey is the primary instrument to determine the effectiveness of the assistance and its effect on the life of the recipient households benefitting from the ESSN Programme. PDM survey measures income, expenditure, debt, and coping oriented variables at the household level. The survey has a stratified simple random sample and representative on both national and regional levels. Data was collected in the period between June and September 2020 under the COVID19- circumstances via remote outbound calls. PDM surveys are conducted quarterly with the participation of around 5000 recipient and non-recipient households in each round.

6 The IVS was designed and implemented by IFRC and TRC to assess the severity of humanitarian conditions of the refugee population in Turkey, building on a tailored analytical framework, a representative sample at regional and group level and the latest methodological developments in intersectoral analysis. It offers to date the most comprehensive and representative picture of the changes in humanitarian conditions of the refugee population in Turkey since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The IVS results are representative at the regional level (90 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error) and at group level (ESSN eligible vs. ESSN ineligible).

## Monthly Expenditure

As of April 2021, the median monthly expenditure for refugee households is 2,575 TL (IFRC and TRC, 2021). This average changes to a great extent depending on the region, as can be seen in the below Figure 1. The monthly expenditure varies from 2,274 TL in the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia region all the way up to 3,215 TL in the Istanbul region and closely followed with 2,960 TL by the East Marmara region. The rest of the regions are relatively close to each other in terms of the monthly expenditure..

**Evolution of median expenditures between PDM exercises and IVS (PDM8 April 2019, PDM9 April 2020, PDM11 March 2021 in IVS 2021)**

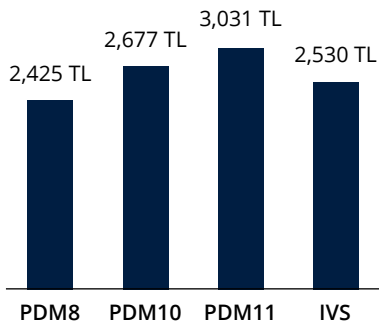


Figure 9

**Total monthly expenditure by region (IVS, IFRC and TRC, 2021)**

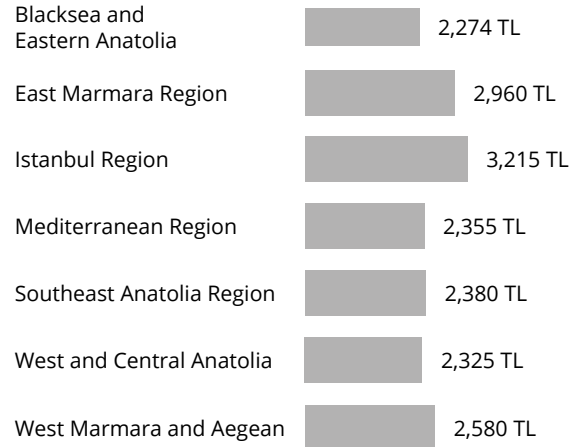


Figure 8

Expenditure levels increased significantly until the end of 2020, following inflation rates and have decreased considerably since, suggesting households are more careful in their consumption. The decrease in expenditures observed following the November 2020 COVID-19 restrictions measures correlates with the decrease in income levels (IFRC and TRC, 2021).



# Net Earnings

The median income is 2000 TL for an average refugee household, among whom with the highest income live in the Istanbul region with 2,600TL monthly on average. This can be explained by higher pay and economic activity, higher number of working household members, and increased job opportunities. The lowest income levels are found in the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia and the Mediterranean region, as seen in the below map of Figure 10.

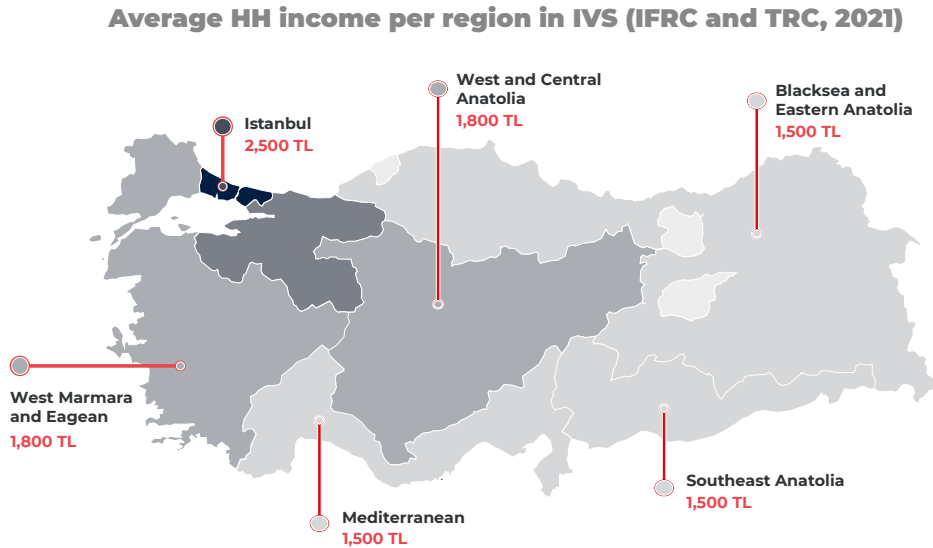


Figure 10

Income levels collected for IVS were compared to previous PDM studies over the years (See Figure 11 below). Households' income levels are found to be decreasing, especially following the November 2020 COVID-19 new restrictions measures.

## Evolution of median income between PDM exercises and IVS (PDM8 April 2019, PDM9 April 2020, PDM11 March 2021 in IVS 2021)

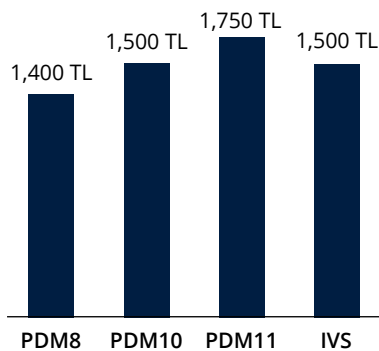


Figure 11

TUIK Data from 2017, though not updated, still provides some insight in terms of the average earnings of the Syrian employees and how it varies depending on the gender, age and province of the employee (See Figure 5). According to this study from ILO, where they used the state household level data from all residents of Turkey (Turkish and non-Turkish), they found out that male workers on average are paid about 250TL more than females (ILO, 2020). Being in Istanbul pays about 280TL more on average. Being a young employer at the ages between 15 and 29 pays 222TL less monthly on average compared to being an adult worker at the ages 30 to 65.

## Syrian Employees' Net Earnings (ILO, 2020)

Syrian Employees							
Statistics	All	Male	Female	Istanbul	Other Areas	Young	Adult
Average Monthly Wage	1,302	1,337	1,083	1,460	1,177	1,216	1,438
Average Hourly Wage	6.21	6.29	5.75	6.81	5.74	5.73	6.97

Figure 12 - Source: HLF5 2017 and author's own calculations. Notes: The table shows average hourly and monthly net wages of Syrian refugees measured in nominal 2017 TRY by sex, age-group and Istanbul/rest of the country. Young refers to those aged 15-29 and adult to those aged 30-65.

The same ILO analysis of state-based household level data indicated that in 2017 refugees with irregular work were earning, on average 250TL less monthly than those with regular. Unskilled services and agriculture provide the lowest income (ILO, 2021). The textile industry provides the highest income (IGAM, 2019). Additional secondary sources examining net earnings at the sectoral level indicate similar patterns. Development Workshop findings illustrate that in the textile sector in Istanbul being a male Turkish employee pays 330 TL more per month compared to a male Syrian employee, 770TL more per month compared to a female Syrian employee (Development Workshop, 2016). The payment difference per month between a female from Turkey and a female from Syria is 400TL. The same difference between female and male Syrian workers is 385TL (See Figure 13)

### The monthly wage rate for workers in the textile sector in 2015 (Development Workshop, 2016)

Employee Characteristics	Average Wage
Female	1,107 TL
Male	1,304 TL
General	1,265 TL
From Turkey	1,395 TL
Female From Turkey	1,183 TL
Male From Turkey	1,493 TL
From Syria	1,134 TL
Female From Syria	776 TL
Male From Syria	1,162 TL

Figure 13

In the agricultural sector, payments tend to be daily. The rates change depending on the difficulty involved in the job. The rates seem to be the same between the Kurdish and Syrian workers (Figure 14), while the rates change depending on the skill level that is necessary to collect the specific agricultural product as in the case of tea leaf cutting. The Development Workshop, with the financial support of the European

Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection- ECHO and the EU Humanitarian Assistance Fund, and in cooperation with the INGO GOAL sets out the present situation of the working and living conditions of the Syrian seasonal migratory agricultural labourers on the Adana Plain (Development Workshop, 2016). Their report illustrates that the Syrian migrants are taking part in agricultural production as a last resort of livelihoods strategy. Wherever they work, wages show a declining trend. Seasonal agricultural production has always been an activity undertaken by the poorest sections of society in Turkey (Development Workshop, 2016, pg. 9). Their wages are less than those paid to local workers and are sometimes not paid at all (See Figure). Furthermore, payment is postponed for long periods and landowners only pay their workers after they have sold off the produce and been paid for it. This could mean a postponement of pay for up to four months. In return for pay, workers are expected to meet daily thresholds.

There are many more studies conducted by the same Development Workshop NGO in collaboration with INGOs such as UNICEF, ILO and GOAL, on the topics of living and economic conditions of the Syrian nomadic and semi-nomadic communities living in areas where seasonal agricultural work is available such as Adana, Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep, with data at varying degrees of representativeness published in May 2020<sup>7</sup>, August 2020<sup>8,9</sup> and as late as April 2021, all demonstrating the ongoing character of the problems these communities are facing despite passing time while providing certain recommendations on how to address them moving forward<sup>10</sup> (Development Workshop, 2016, 2020, 2021).

7 <https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Raporlar/Virus-or-Poverty.pdf>

8 <https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Baris%20Kalkinma/Unseen-Lives-on-Migration-Routes-Current-Situation-and-Needs-Analysis.pdf>

9 <https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Raporlar/Current-Situation-of-Syrian-Nomadic-and-Semi-Nomadic-Communities-Living-in-Adana-Gaziantep-and-Sanliurfa.pdf>

10 <https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Baris%20Kalkinma/Advocacy-Strategy-of-Syrian-Nomadic-and-Semi-Nomadic-Communities-and-Syrian-Seasonal-Migrant-Agricultural-Workers-in-Turkey.pdf>

## The daily wage rate for seasonal agricultural workers in 2015 (Development Workshop, 2016)

Worker Group	Produce/Activity	Daily Wages (TL)	Additional Payments
Georgian Workers	Tea-leaf Cutting	90-100	Lunch, Cigarettes, Phone credits
Azerbaijani Workers	Fodder Cutting	90-100	Lunch, Cigarettes
Georgian workers	Hazelnuts	45-50	Lunch, Accomodation, Dinner
Domestic migrant seasonal agricultural workers (from Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Adiyaman, etc.)	Hazelnuts	42	Lunch, Tent space or Accomodation allocation
Syrian Workers	Apricots	42	Lunch, Tent space allocation
Domestic migrant seasonal agricultural workers (from Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Adiyaman, etc.)	Apricots	42	Lunch, Tent space allocation
Syrian Workers	Citrus fruits, Vegetables, Pistachios	24-40	N / A

Figure 14

On the Adana Plain, Syrian workers are paid according to the kabala or götürü methods. Workers are generally engaged with a single job as a family or team. For example, ten people from the same family or a team of 35 might work on the same job. In the citrus harvest, a team of 30-35 people are paid their daily wage in exchange for picking enough fruit to fill up the hold of truck in a day. In the pepper harvest, each worker is paid a day's wage for collecting 11 bags of peppers.

Agricultural intermediaries, who play a vital role in organising seasonal agricultural production, are a widely used historical institution for the continuation of agricultural output in large agricultural regions such as Adana. They function like an employment agency. Besides their mediation role in bringing workers and employers together, agricultural intermediaries also fulfil many other functions such as ensuring that the workers reside close to fields of production, that they are transported to work and that they can meet their food and other needs. In return for their services, intermediaries get 10 percent of the gross wages fixed for labourers. They are also said to take a cut from the net pay received by the workers (Development Workshop, 2019, pg. 13). The Workshop report, considering the interviews conducted with the Syrian workers, conclude that it is a rational choice for migrants to find work through agricultural intermediaries given that they seldom speak the local language and have little knowledge of how to proceed with work relationships.

In a more recent report on the same issue published on April 2021, the Development Workshop Agency reports that due to the COVID-19 conditions, things have become worse instead of better for the Syrian seasonal workers despite the four years passed since the last report: 75 percent of the workers temporarily lost their jobs due to limitations in mobility and decrease in the production while 42 percent still depend on intermediaries to find any jobs in this sector<sup>11</sup> (Development Workshop, 2019).



11 [https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Raporlar/guvencesiz\\_emek\\_karantinada.pdf](https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Raporlar/guvencesiz_emek_karantinada.pdf)

## Debt vs. Income

As mentioned before, borrowing from relatives, friends, and local markets to cover the basic needs of the households have increasingly become the main coping mechanism during the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation measures implemented by governments to stop the spreading of the virus. According to the IVS (IFRC and TRC, 2021), 75 percent of refugee households report having debt. The Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia is the region with the least percentage of households with debt (65 percent) and Southeast Anatolia Region reports the highest percentage of households with debt (78 percent). The median debt (calculated excluding households without debt) is 2,800 TL, showing they are contracting higher debts to cope with the current conditions. 66 percent of households have an accumulated debt that is greater than their total one-month worth income. Among these households, for 43 percent of them this total debt they owe is greater than two months of their income (See Figure 15). Comparison of debt levels over time indicates that the debt level has reached its highest level over the last 12 months, with a two-thirds increase since pre-COVID-19 levels (IFRC and TRC, 2021). Beyond the IFRC and TRC reports, there is very limited analysis on the debt issue, making it a topic worth of further investigation.

**Percentage of households with debt greater than monthly income (IVS, IFRC, and TRC 2021)**

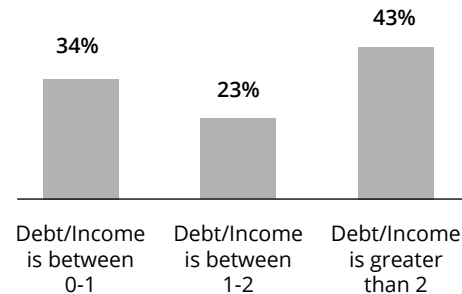


Figure 15

## (In)formality of Employment

Numerous studies have probed the issue of informality in the Syrian labour market. Informal work arrangements are pervasive among Syrian refugees with 9 in 10 working without being registered in the social security institution (ILO 2020). Among 2,100,000 Syrians of working age: 911,106 active in the labour force 800,000 informally (Atlantic Council and UNDP, 2020). 9 in 10 works without social security, thus informally. 92 percent of those who work do not have a work permit, meaning they work informally. They have been limited to the informal sector due to many reasons including the requirements of the formal work sectors related to language, educational accreditation, skills. The quota system dictates the number of individuals under temporary protection (TP) in a workplace cannot exceed the number of Turkish workers by more than 10 percent (Watan and IBC, 2020) while it is 5 percent for the non-Syrian foreigners. Syrians also choose informality over the loss of cash assistance. Critically, data shows that some Syrian respondents do not TL to pursue formal work, but instead pursue informal work, for fear of losing access to this financial assistance. (IGAM, 2019).

According to a 2020 study from ILO, the main sectors of informal work that Syrians are engaged in are the textile, garment, leather, and footwear industries. 65 percent of all Syrian informal employees work in regular workplaces, followed by 17 percent working mobile or irregularly; 12 percent work in the field, and the rest from home businesses. The comparison



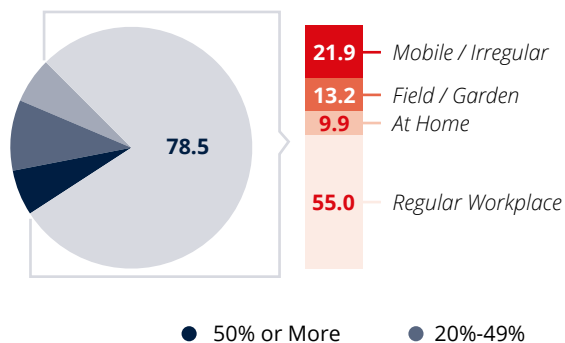
**“No, you cannot make a living without borrowing money. Previously, you could work 22 days, 20 days. Now you work 12 days, you are unemployed for 18 days. If you don't work, you have no money. Debt became mandatory due to this corona. A year ago, Kızılaykart was able to both pay our rent and cover some of our expenses. Now it may only afford my house rent. All middle-income earners are able to spend thanks to borrowing ”**

- Male refugee from Samsun, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2021)

with the Turkish informal work firm size distributions can be found in the below Figure 16. Accordingly, majority of the refugees working in these sectors do so without a work permit. It is important to note that the decision to choose informal vs. formal work is not entirely in control of the refugees: the job availability in these sectors also limit their options, among many other contributing factors such as risking losing their assistance when employed formally. Informal work also comes with many serious costs.

### Firm size distribution and type of microbusinesses, informal employees: (ILO, 2020)

(a) Turkish natives



(b) Syrian refugees

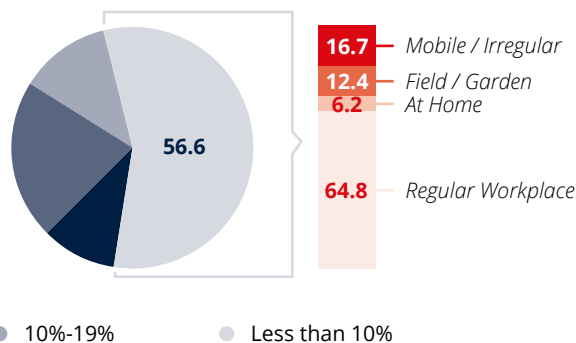
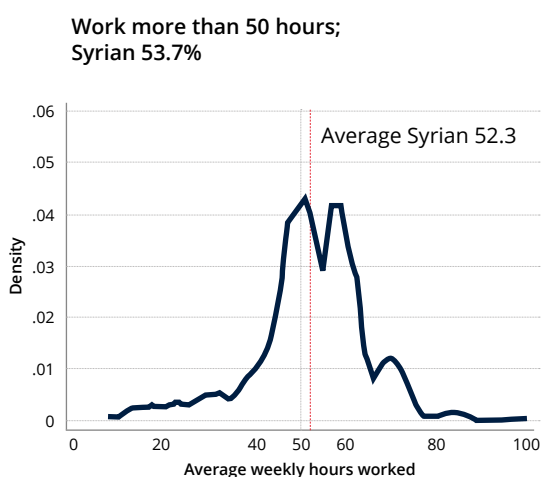


Figure 16 - 2017 HLSF and author's own calculations. Notes: The figure shows (i) the nationality-specific distribution of company sizes for Syrian refugee and Turkish informal employees (in blue) and (ii) the nationality and company size-specific share of workplace types for companies with less than 10 employees.

Syrians working informally often must work long hours, without recourse to protection mechanisms such as Turkish labour law or trade unions. The nature of the low-skilled informal work opportunities is precarious: salaries are paid irregularly or not paid at all, and employment safety is not guaranteed (IGAM, 2019, pg. 29). In the formal market, Syrians work for 52 hours on average while Turks work 46 hours on average while due to limited large sample data on the informal market there is no representative comparison of working hours in the informal market though anecdotal data indicates it to be longer than the formal jobs (See Figure 17).

### Employees average weekly hours worked, by nationality: a. Syrian refugees b. Turkish natives, ILO, 2020

(a) Syrian Refugees



(b) Turkish Natives

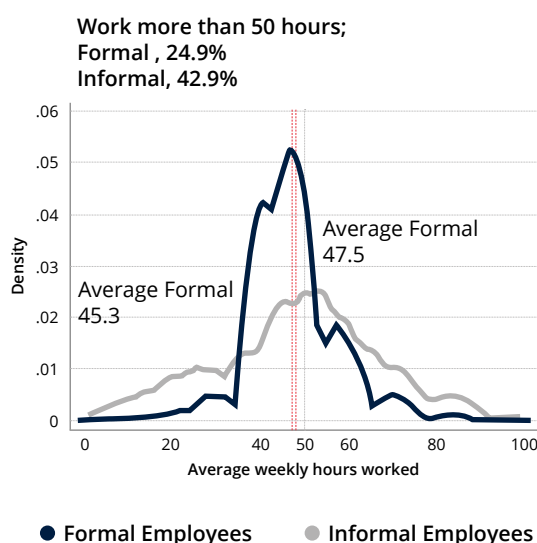


Figure 17 - 2017 HLSF and author's own calculations. Notes: The figure shows the distribution (probability density function) of average weekly hours worked by (a) Syrian employees, (b) Turkish informal employees and (c) Turkish formal employees using Kernel density estimation. the height of graph corresponds to the frequency of employees with given number of hours worked.

## (Ir)regularity of Employment

Regular work is not equal to formal work. It is defined as having a contract and pre-determined working hours. Study results demonstrated that over half of refugees (54 percent) are working irregularly; this figure is 80 percent among those providing unskilled services (WFP and TRC, 2019). Job regularity is the highest in the textile sector; 79 percent of refugees working in textiles have regular work, followed by manufacturing with 78 percent, clerk jobs 72 percent, artisans 32 percent, handyman 62 percent, and shoe industry 60 percent. It is lowest in the agricultural sector with 8 percent, home-based businesses 10 percent, construction 16½ and other unskilled services 20 percent (See Figure 10).

## Unemployment and Employment

According to the estimates from the 2020 Atlantic Council/UNDP Report, there are 157,000 working Syrian refugee women and 191,000 working Syrian under-age boys in Turkey. There are also about 10,000 businesses established by Syrians, which employ 70,000 people. The estimated job opportunities to enable the least vulnerable refugees to exit the ESSN Programme is 167,000 (Atlantic Council and UNDP, 2020). As of April 2021, 76 percent of all refugee households experienced loss of job due to the COVID-19 related measures. 76 percent of all male adults and only 8 percent of all female adults take part in the income generating activities during the same period (IFRC and TRC, 2021). 83 percent of all refugee households had at least one household member working in the last 30 days as of April 2021: 64 percent of households had one working member and 15 percent had two (Ibid). 17.5 percent of these households are suffering from total unemployment. Regions, where household members are the least employed, are the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia (28 percent), Mediterranean (19 percent), and West and Central Anatolia (20 percent) (See the Figure 11).

Regularity Level of Different Employment Sector Jobs

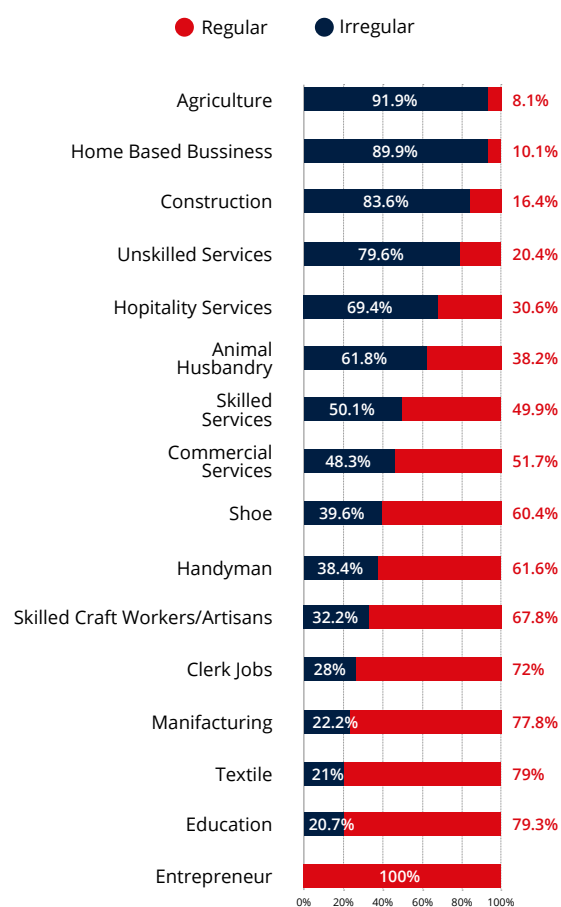


Figure 18



**Percentage of households with working members in the last 30 days  
(IVS, IFRC and TRC, 2021)**

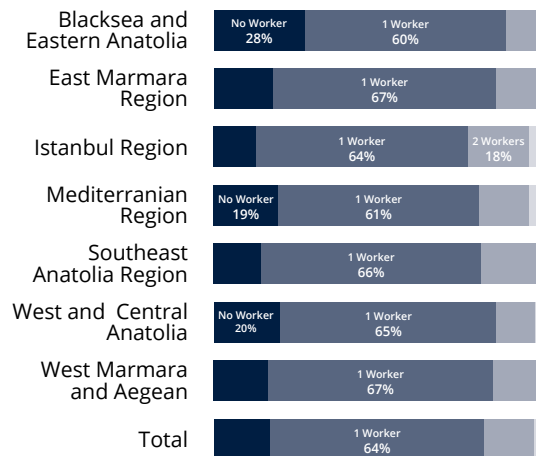


Figure 19

On the other hand, according to the December 2020 study (Watan and IBC), the situation is even more worrisome: nearly half of the respondents' families do not include a working member, while 60 percent of all HHs are unemployed. According to the result of this representative study, as of December 2020 the majority of females (81 percent) and 29 percent of males are unemployed (See Figure 26).

**Number of Working Individuals in the Family (Watan and IBC, 2020)**

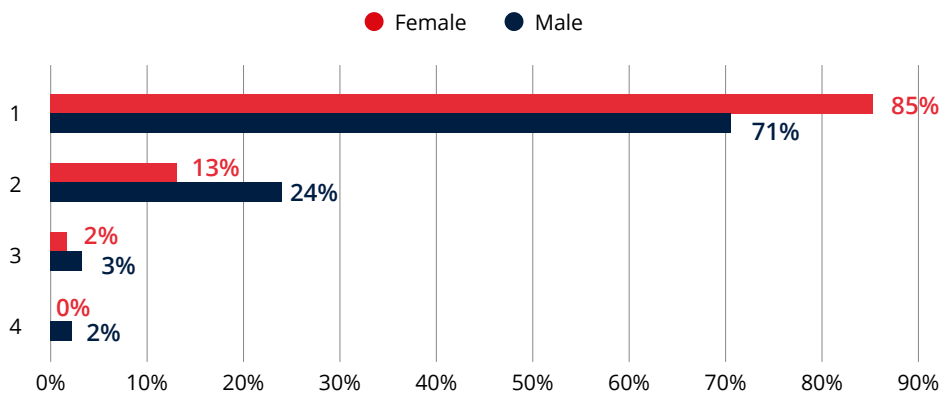


Figure 20

More working members are generally found in Istanbul and West Marmara and Aegean regions compared to others while the Black Sea and Eastern Anatolia have the lowest percentage of working members per family. Additionally, the highest percentage of working females above 18 years is reported in Southeast Anatolia Region. Overall unemployment varies from a maximum of 67 percent in Hatay to a minimum of 37 percent in Mersin (See Figure 21).

## Number of Workers in the Family (Watan and IBC, 2020)

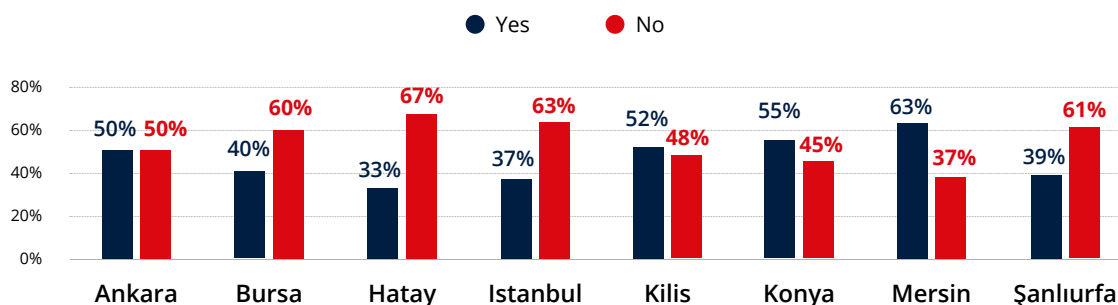


Figure 21

## Child Employment

According to the IVS results, child labour is less frequent for female children, with 7 percent of males under 18 years reporting working and 1 percent of females under 18 years reporting working. The overall child-labour rate in IVS findings is significantly lower than some other studies findings including the Watan and IBC study from December 2020, in which 29 percent of all HHS has a child breadwinner. This figure is higher (39 percent) for female-led households (See Figure 22).

The situation seems to change a lot depending on the place: while it is very common in Şanlıurfa, Konya, Ankara, and Bursa, it is not as common in Kilis and Hatay (See Figure 23). Geography also determines the type of job the children are involved in Ankara, all of the children in the sample are working in tailoring, in Mersin half and in Bursa 38 percent work in tailoring. In Konya all children sampled are working as shoemakers, in Hatay, all children in the sample are daily workers. Half of the respondents in Mersin and Şanlıurfa also work as daily workers. The IBC study that produced these results by a random sample of 2,211 Syrian refugees from the 7 provinces, where most Syrians reside in. However, even though at the household level this sampling is representative, it is not representative of the Syrian child-breadwinners. Thus, the results shared here on their labour conditions, though useful, should still be read with caution.

## Is there a Child-breadwinner in the Family? (Watan and IBC, 2020)

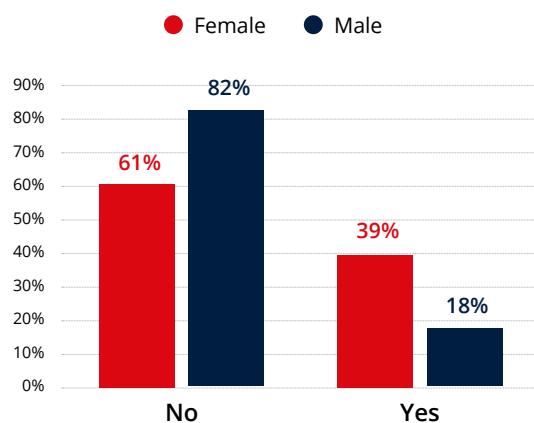


Figure 22

### What kind of work does the Child-breadwinner in the Family (If any) do? (Watan and IBC, 2020)

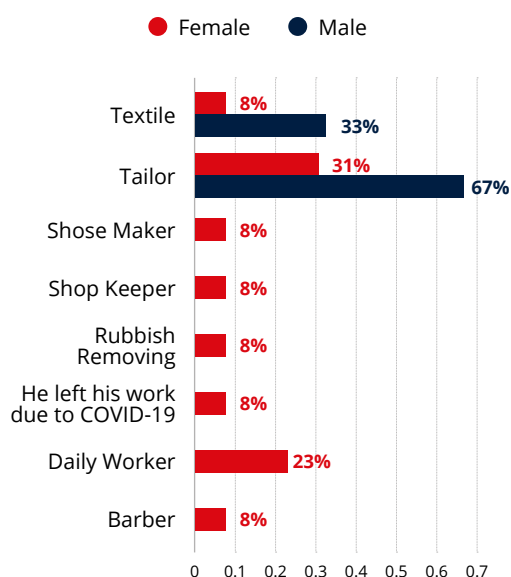


Figure 23

A June 2019 Development Workshop and UNICEF collaborative study on the child labour issue focuses on the Turkish and Syrian families, who rely on seasonal work in the agriculture sector for their livelihoods. In this sample of 209 families, 43 percent of the active labour comes from children. The household profiles show that seasonal agricultural work is mainly undertaken by the lowest socio-economic groups in the society for both the Turkish and Syrian families. The average age of the Syrian households in this study is 16 and 94.6 percent of them live in tents they pitch by themselves. Members of these households have low levels of literacy and a lack of professional skills. Their involvement in this specific livelihood sector seems to solidify their poverty by preventing the next generation from moving upwards (Development Workshop, 2019, pg. 12). Working children drop out of the school, or sometimes they never start school at all. These children cannot have chances to develop occupational skills or knowledge for any other line of work.

Surveys reveal that the main motivation behind the child labour practices is to increase the family income. More than half of the household representatives listed “to contribute to the family budget” as a primary motivator, with 30 percent of HH also listing “to help pay for the family’s debt” as a major reason. On the other hand, 86.6 percent of the household representative also claimed that they are unwilling to let their children work but they have no other choice, while 11 percent said “we do not want them to work, they need to go to school”. The average starting age of the household representatives as seasonal agricultural workers is 15. When asked why they started working at such a young age, the children confirm the reasoning of their household heads, with 95.6 percent of child respondents stating “I wanted to contribute to my family’s budget, because we were having financial difficulties” (Development Workshop, 2019, pg. 17).

## Types of Employment

According to the Syrian Barometer data, 20 percent of the refugees in Turkey work in unskilled services, followed by textile (19 percent), construction (12 percent), and artisanship (10 percent). The sectors where refugees are least employed are shoemaking (6 percent), commercial services, and handyman jobs (both 5 percent) (See Figure 24). Syrians current and previous professional work can often be categorized within the low to semi-skilled category, and these groups usually find work as manual labourers at small and medium-sized Turkish enterprises (Erdogan,2020). As shown within the TRC/WFP studies, this is likely due to the various disadvantages these groups face within the labour market, including limited previous skilled job experience (IFRC & TRC, 2021) language barriers (WFP and TRC, 2019), and other issues,



## Type of Employment of Interviewed Individual, Syrian Barometer (Erdogan, 2020)

Type of Employment of Interviewed Individual (18+ Year-olds)				Type of Employment of Individuals in Households (12+ Year-olds)			
		#	%			#	%
1	Regularly Working Employee	362	46.8	1	Regularly Working Employee	828	50.2
2	Casual (Daily) Worker	216	27.9	2	Casual (Daily) Worker	553	33.6
3	Self-employed / Artisan	153	19.8	3	Self-employed / Artisan	184	11.2
4	Employer (Employing 1 or more individuals)	29	3.7	4	Employer (Employing 1 or more individuals)	41	2.5
5	Seasonal Worker	11	1.4	5	Seasonal Worker	32	1.9
6	Unpaid Family Employee	3	0.4	6	Unpaid Family Employee	10	0.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>774</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>		<b>1648</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Figure 24

When it comes to the type of profession, IVS's April 2021 results interestingly provide evidence to the argument that the job types refugees in Turkey mostly work in require higher skill levels compared to the skill levels of the jobs they were involved with in Syria (See Figure 25 below). Before coming to Turkey, households that were working were mostly engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. After moving to Turkey, the proportion of unskilled workers decreased nearly by half, while the proportion of semi-skilled workers increased from 35 percent to 44 percent, showing that refugees have increased professional skills or improved access to more qualified jobs in Turkey with experience. The percentage of households where the most qualified individual was not working decreased from 14 percent to 8 percent, suggesting a return to professional life for most of them. In the case, a second person in the household is engaged in income-generating activities (this is the case in 15 percent of the households), they generally engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs.

### Highest level of Profession available in the Household: before vs. after Turkey (IVS, IFRC, and TRC, 2021)

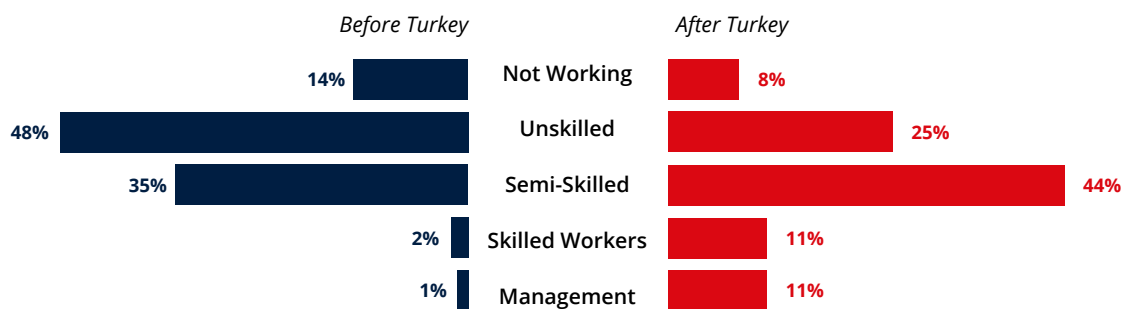


Figure 25

**“Payments are not well. We work for too cheap, I mean, 3 - 5 TRY for making 100 pairs of shoes.”**

- Refugee woman from Istanbul, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2021).

**“First of all, I know no Turkish. (...)They give 300 lira per week, 12 hours are wasted, they do not pay you 900 TRY but max. 300-350 TRY. It is not worth it.”**

- Refugee woman from Istanbul, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2021).

On the other hand, according to the December 2020 study, the majority of males (52 percent) are daily workers, working in professions such as construction, sanitation, and electrical installations, which is 12 percent among females.

### Type of Current Work (Watan and IBC, 2020)

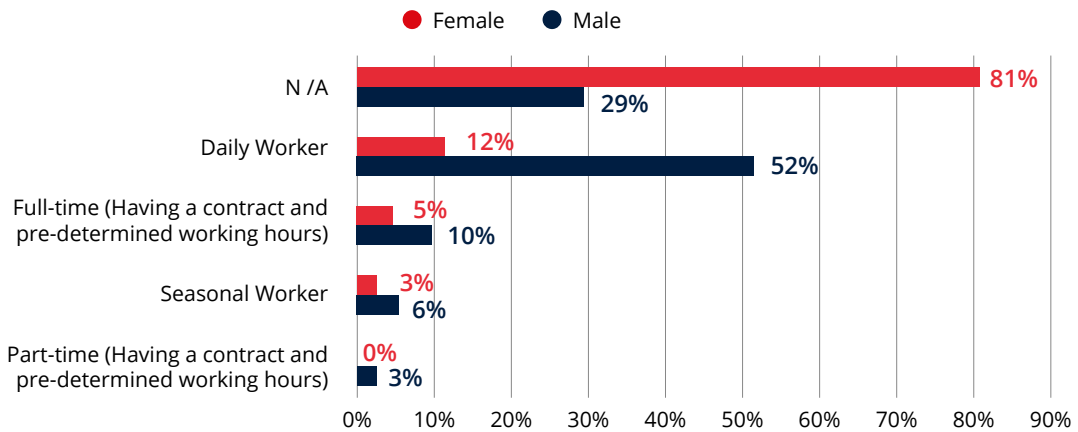


Figure 26

When geographical differences are taken into consideration, the highest percentage of respondents in all of the provinces are unemployed: ranging from 43 percent in Konya to 67 percent in Mersin. Depending on the province they live in, the jobs in which Syrians are employed range from (Figure 27) (Watan and IBC, 2020):

### Type of Current Work by Province (Watan and IBC, 2020)

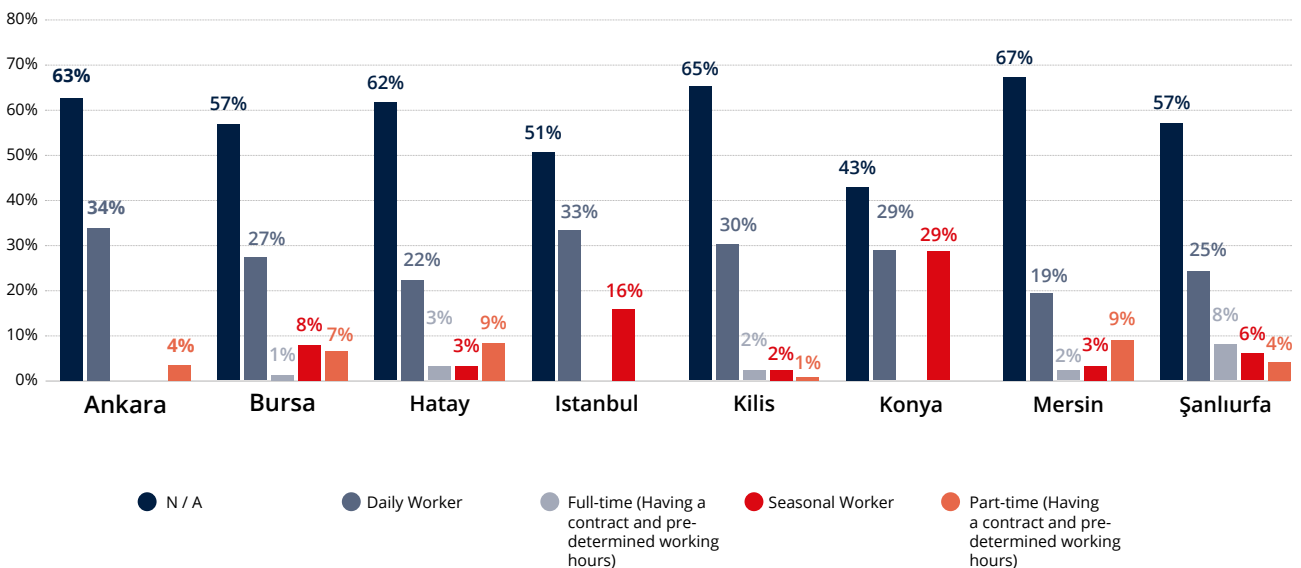


Figure 27

# Challenges to Employment

Access to national systems such as health, education, employment, and social services, as well as the right to access work permits and formal employment, has been granted to the refugees living in Turkey by the Turkish authorities. Nevertheless, there have been many challenges in accessing work opportunities for the refugees. Access to income and formal employment remains the main challenge of the economic integration of refugees (Atlantic Council and UNDP, 2020). Despite the Work Permit Regulation for Syrians under Temporary Protection, only 137,497 work permits have been issued to Syrians since January 2016, according to the UNDP. The low intake has largely been due requirements related to language, educational accreditation and skills. There are also barriers to acquiring the permit, including information gaps, costs, the unwillingness of employers to apply for the permit, delays in acquiring the permit, permits rejected, among others. The quota system is another barrier: the number of individuals under temporary protection in a workplace cannot exceed the number of Turkish workers by more than 10 percent. Limited livelihood opportunities further increase vulnerable households' dependence on assistance in order to meet their basic needs (Atlantic Council and UNDP, 2020).

According to Watan and International Blue Crescent's study of December 2020, half of the families do not include working members due to:

**Childcare Responsibilities**  
**43%**

**Disability in The Family**  
**21%**

**Language Barrier**  
**17%**

**Lack Of Skill, Among Other Reasons**  
**14%**

\* See Figure 28

**Main Challenges against Employment (Watan and IBC, 2020)**

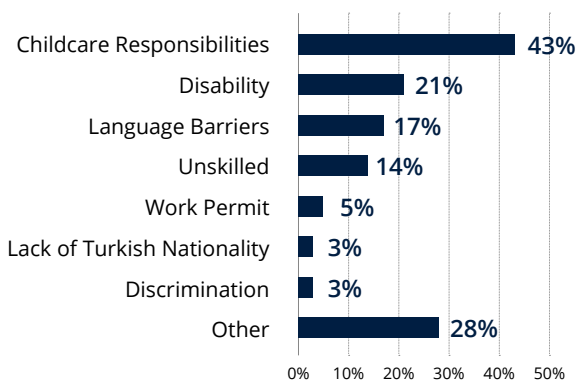


Figure 28

The below quotations from a recent FGD study conducted with refugee women also support the above findings that childcare responsibilities are the main reason behind the unemployment rates:

“

**“If there was a place to leave the kids nearby when we worked, where we could also watch them playing a far while working, why would we not work? Of course.”**

- Refugee man from Istanbul, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2020)

“

**“I have children, they cannot see their father, I want them to at least see their mother. But I do not have problems of trust, if I had a place to leave the kids and necessary skills to work, I would want to work.”**

-Refugee man from Istanbul, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2020)

## Employability Factors

The majority of the participants of the Watan and International Blue Crescent's study stated that they are willing to work if they were trained and provided with the necessary equipment and tools (Watan and IBC, 2020). Though unemployment is high among refugees and the economic situation has not been favourable to them during the pandemic times, their employability still depends to a degree on factors such as education, language, and the previously existing or newly built skillsets. Drawing on data from a survey of 1,235 Syrian refugees (Knappert, Kornau and Figengül, 2018), study findings show that those who are younger, men, having a diploma higher than secondary school and those who had higher income levels before migration and have better Turkish language proficiency, on average, have a higher likelihood of being employed.

## Education

According to the Syrian Barometer data, 33 percent of Syrians cannot read or write, 13 percent can read and write with no formal education, 17 percent have primary education, 6 percent have secondary and 6 percent have high school education (Figure 29) (Erdoğan, 2019). Similarly, 2016 Research on Health Context of Syrians in Turkey study conducted by AFAD and WHO has found that 14,9 percent of Syrians have no official education and 14,3 percent have a lower than primary school level of education (AFAD, 2016 in Erdoğan, 2019). According to a Hacettepe University 2018 Population and Health Syrian Refugee Survey, those with no primary school diploma constitute 35 percent among men and 40 percent among women in the Syrian community in Turkey. (Erdoğan, 2019)

**Syrians Level of Education (Syrian Barometer, Erdogan, 2019)**

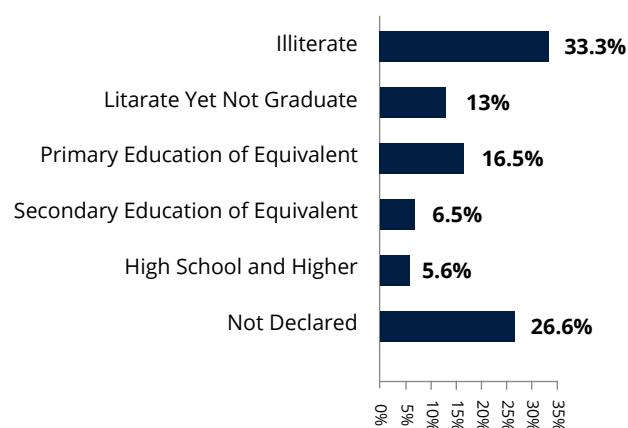


Figure 29



According to the 2020 ILO study that compares Syrians to Turkish hosts, in terms of educational attainment, the main difference between them is among the least educated ones; while 31.8 percent of Syrians (aged 15 or older) did not complete primary education only 14.9 percent of Turkish natives left school at such an early stage (Figure). This difference in primary school dropouts further translated in higher percentages of Turkish people with primary education but not among those secondary or tertiary education. This might be due to the Syrian population being relatively young (ILO, 2020).

### The educational level of Syrian refugees (ILO, 2020)

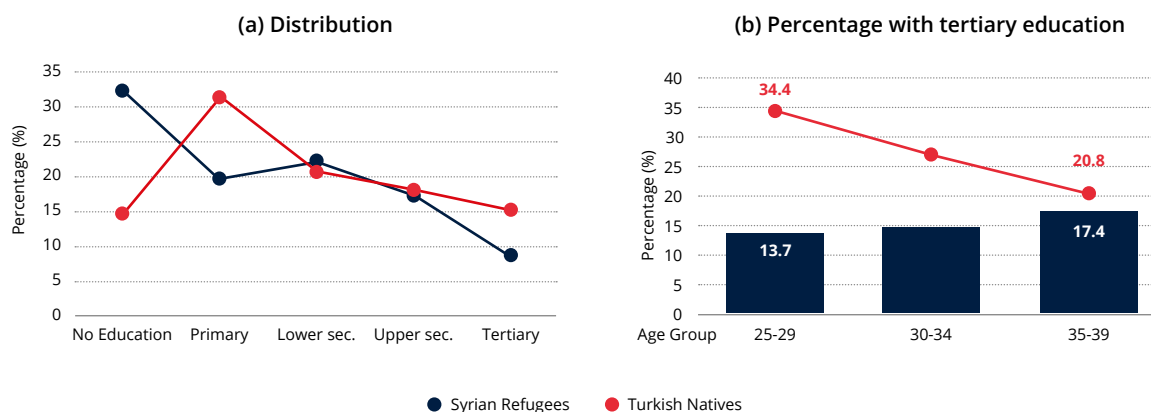


Figure 30

According to the IVS 2021 study results, more than one-third of all Syrians cannot read or write, 13 percent can read and write but has no degree. Those who have a high school or higher education is only 6 percent. Among those with education, most are primary school graduates (IFRC and TRC, 2021).

## Language

The Turkish language is the most needed training according to half of the respondents, followed by vocational trainings, interview skills, and CV writing. Syrians state being able to speak Turkish means (IGAM, 2019):

- They could go about their lives more easily
- Employers cannot take advantage of them as cheap informal labour
- Landlords cannot take as much advantage of them with inflated rents
- Interactions with the host community would improve.

According to the 2019 TRC Livelihoods Survey Findings, among all Syrian refugees, 18 percent have intermediate level Turkish, while only about 3 percent are at the advanced level category (See Figure 31). According to IVS (IFRC and TRC, 2021), Only 27 percent of all household members are reported being proficient or fluent in Turkish. 52 percent do not speak Turkish (27 percent) or have only a basic level (25 percent).

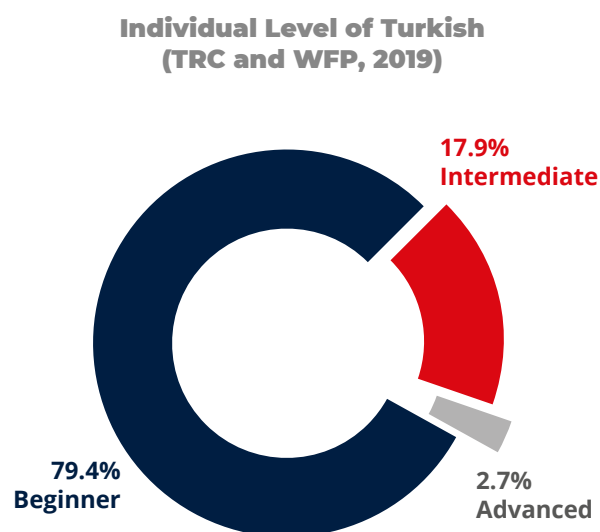


Figure 31- Findings show that the Turkish language level of the respondents is predominantly at the basic level. The low level of Turkish language level indicates the urgent need for language courses.

Analysis results from the April 2021 IVS showed that families that have been living in Turkey for more than three years and with members with a better command of the Turkish language generally find more income earning opportunities and are facing less severe humanitarian conditions. Studies conducted with Turkish employers indicate that refugees' limitation to low-skilled jobs is largely related to their lacking language skills, as one employer pointed out: "After all if someone is a civil engineer or a computer engineer—you cannot let such a person work in construction. [But] there are a lot of people working like this. Because they cannot express themselves well." (Employer, furniture store, male, personal communication, May 2, 2016, Knappert, Kornau and Figengül, 2018, pg. 70).

On the FGDs conducted by IGAM on livelihoods topic, it was seen that the command of the Turkish language was perceived as the most critical element in facilitating employment as well as social life by both Syrian and Turkish respondents. According to the same report, many Syrian respondents explained that being able to speak Turkish meant that they could go about their lives more easily: employers cannot take as much advantage of them as cheap informal labour, landlords cannot take as much advantage of them with inflated rents and Turkish host community members would generally interact with them more generously. Successful command of the Turkish language was described to be even more important and useful than having formal employment – arguably, understanding one's legal rights underpins being able to claim them. (IGAM,2019).

Successful command of the Turkish language is proven to be even more important and useful than having formal employment. Data supports that skills influence employability (TRC and WFP, 2019). While 50 percent of the refugees with beginner-level Turkish were employed full-time, this increased to 60 percent among the refugees with intermediate or advanced Turkish. In terms of monthly income, refugees with advanced Turkish made an average of 70 TL more per month than refugees with an intermediate level of Turkish skills (1,280 TL and 1,211 TL respectively). Respondents with beginner-level Turkish earned 1,015 TL average monthly income (TRC and WFP, 2019).

## Vocational Trainings

Turkish language is deemed the most needed training for employability according to nearly half of the respondents, followed by vocational training and personal skills training with 41 percent and interview and CV writing skills with 13 percent (See Figure 32). There are "other" types of support that a large portion of the refugees seem to think is relevant for employability not covered in this study as well, that require future research.

**The Livelihood Support Needed to Improve Employability acc. to the Refugees (Watan and IBC, 2020)**

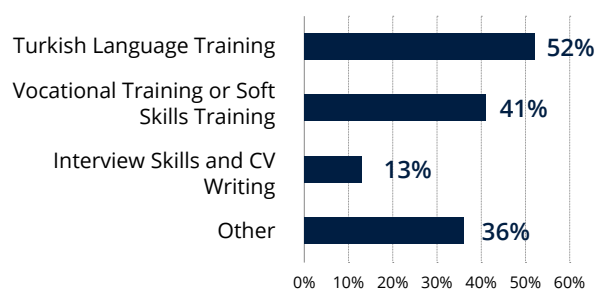


Figure 32

**Participation rate in any kind of trainings including technical, vocational, language and skills in the last six months by province (Watan and IBC, 2020)**

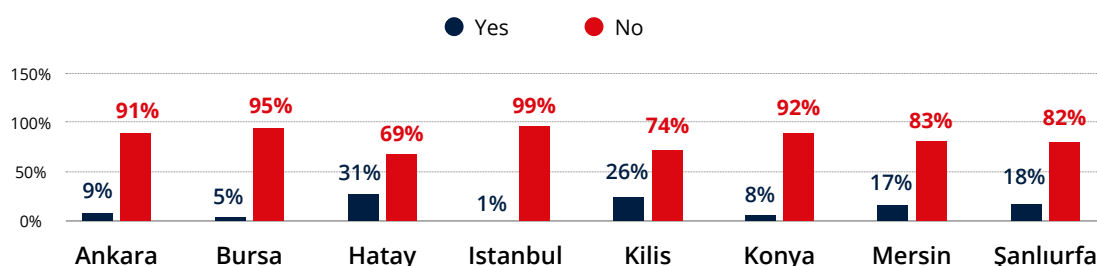


Figure 33

Watan and IBC (2020) study shows that one in ten refugees had received training since arriving in Turkey, mainly language or vocational training. WFP and TRC Livelihoods study show that only about 9 percent of refugees participated in a course or training (See Figure 34)(TRC and WFP, 2019) . Though in most of the provinces participation in any kind of trainings that are organized whether by the state or local and international NGOs are low, at around 10 percent, in some special cases the number is considerably higher: in Hatay the 31 percent and in Kilis 26 percent of the refugees surveyed attended to some type of training, while this number is as low as 1 percent in Istanbul region. To better analyse why there is such a great variation between different provinces, follow-up research is needed. It would also help to map different available resources in these provinces provided by the state and non-state institutions to have a more complete picture (See Figure 33 above).

### Percentage of Refugee Individuals who attend courses (TRC and WFP, 2019)

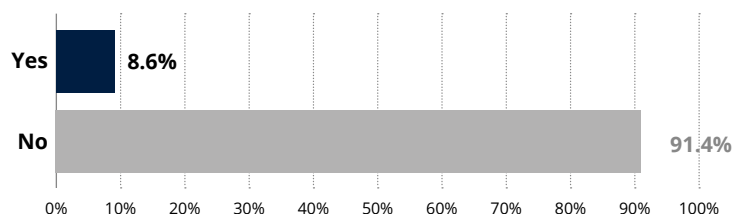


Figure 34 - Among 5,332 people that participated in the survey 440 of them only participated in a course or training. These 440 respondents participated in a total of 449 trainings/courses

More than twice as many females had received training as males, with similar findings for unemployed vs. employed respondents. (TRC and WFP, 2019). The trainee profile is mostly unemployed females, indicating that others in the household may be busy at work. The bulk of trainings attended were offered by the Government and were mostly Turkish language courses (Figure 35).

Respondents declared that they mainly participated in Turkish language courses. Based on the data on language ability, education level, and participated courses it can be inferred that insufficient Turkish is an important barrier at entering the labor market hence the number of Turkish language courses should be increased.

### Breakdown of Trainings (TRC and WFP, 2019)

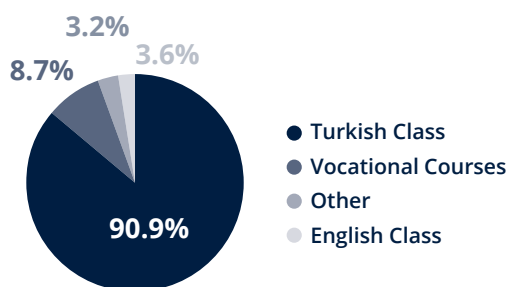


Figure 33

## An Unrealized Potential

There is an unrealized potential among refugees with high education, who make up about 6 percent of all refugees. Unemployment is relatively high among refugees with no formal education, but also those with the highest levels of education (TRC and WFP, 2019). Of the 18 percent of refugees in the same study that are classified as educated, one-fifth were unemployed. The one-fifth of those without any formal education were also unemployed. Data also suggests the existence of some highly capable Syrians that might not be realizing their full potential, something that is not only negative for them but also the Turkish economy. (ILO, 2020, pg.5).

While one might assume that there needs to be correlation between level of education and being employed, the latest unpublished FGD study conducted by IFRC and TRC that aims to explore the livelihoods experiences of refugee women in Turkey with data collected between September and October 2020 confirms that there is no direct relationship between education and access to employment: "I am a mother, and I am trying to work as a translator and as a teacher. My

field of study is actually petrol engineering. In Syria, it is very difficult to be in this field, and it takes a long time, do you understand? The working hours of the petrol sector are very long so because of these conditions. I will work as a teacher and translator until my children grow up.” Woman, İstanbul (IFRC and TRC, 2021). Two other studies by TRC (2019) and the Atlantic Council (2020) also provides data showing that especially beyond the secondary level, higher education does not mean a higher likelihood of employability.

Most refugees work in low-skilled jobs in the personal services sector, restaurant industry, or construction business. Many of them, in particular the male refugees, made clear that their current jobs did not match their education, expertise, or expectations but were rather a necessity to survive (Knappert, Kornau and Figengül, 2018, pg. 69). Limited opportunities that refugees have in the labour market, was also confirmed by several experts that were interviewed. The situation was summarized by a UN official as “a tendency [within the Turkish economy] to employ Syrians for jobs that Turkish people prefer less” (Head of program, UN, Male, May 2016 in Knappert, Kornau and Figengül, 2018).

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**“I am a mother, and I am trying to work as a translator and as a teacher. My field of study is actually petrol engineering. In Syria, it is very difficult to be in this field, and it takes a long time, do you understand? The working hours of the petrol sector are very long so because of these conditions, I will work as a teacher and translator until my children grow up.”**

- Refugee woman from İstanbul, (FGD Data, IFRC and TRC, 2020).

## Main Findings and the Way Forward

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Studies elaborated in this SDR report show that in the context of the COVID-19 increasing poverty, unemployment and expenses have moved the already vulnerable refugee households into a precarious situation of extreme vulnerability. More than 90 percent of refugees who work, work informally and 54 percent work in irregular, low-paying jobs. Less than 10 percent of all females work. There are both systematic and practical inequalities in the treatment and payments between Turks and Syrians as well as among Syrians between male and female workers.

The economic downturn both worsened these effects and further compounded the existing vulnerabilities. The data soundly demonstrates that the degree of this impact varies depending on the structure of the household, gender of the head of the household, and regional capacity for employment. Data illustrates that considerable number of the refugee individuals still lack the necessary skills for long-term formal employment. The most relevant skill to have is language. High education beyond \secondary school does not translate to a higher likelihood of employment. Refugees have limited attendance to available livelihoods activities (TRC and WFP, 2019), though they are well aware of the potential difference these trainings would make due to household responsibilities, mainly childbearing (Watan and IBC, 2020).

Studies covered in this report illustrate well that when it comes to refugees in the Turkish economy, the informal work reality and the difficulties that creates such as poor working conditions, limited access to labor rights, protection measures of the state and the resulting prevalence of poverty is a much more relevant issue than barriers in front of access to work permits, meaning formal work. It is critical to acknowledge that refugees in Turkey have justifiable reasons to prefer informal jobs, though in the long run it is not the best option for their sustainable livelihoods. Most Syrians do not have the necessary skill set to be competitive enough to succeed in the formal sector. They also rightfully do not want to lose their ESSN assistance, because being covered by the state welfare system via gaining formal work would make them ineligible for the Programme. On the other hand, there are some systemic reasons that push them to informal work. For example, the textile sector, though informal, is the most regular and pays well. Similarly, agricultural sector due to its relatively easy access mechanisms led by intermediary agencies including the child labor factor, is perceived by the most vulnerable members of the refugee community as the only viable option of survival. As a result, legal mechanisms that would protect them if they were formally employed will not be available to the working refugees as overwhelming majority of them work informally.

As the Development Agency's April 2021 Report on informal working conditions of Syrians rightfully suggests, in the short run, development and humanitarian agencies may develop projects to increase social protections for at-risk workers, in particular by delivering unconditional cash-based assistance. In preparation for future crises, extensions of social protections to marginalized populations via establishment of lines of communication that allow them to reach at-risk populations quickly will need to be built. This requires comprehensive mapping and situation assessment exercises and building trustful relationships with workers, as well as intermediaries and employers (Development Agency, 2021).<sup>12</sup> The most recent study on this issue by DRC published in August 2021 explores the perceptions of the Syrian refugees in the Southeast Turkey on formal employment confirms the findings of the studies covered in this SDR report to a great extent. Its most relevant addition to this discussion is that there is a lack of information on the refugees' side about their rights in case they choose to work formally and there is a variation in their willingness to pursue formal work depending on the province and region they work in. These findings can be interpreted as a need for more sensitization activities by keeping the regionality factor in mind. (DRC, 2021).

Livelihoods support activities such as vocational trainings and language education, except some provinces in the Southeast, do not seem to reach their relevant audience among the refugees due to more urgent issues that they need to attend to. There is a vicious cycle for the refugees when it comes to this issue: they see the importance of these activities for employability, they do want to attend but they cannot because they need to prioritize their survival, which becomes harder due to their limited attendance. The small number of refugees, who have a high potential for employability due to their education cannot realize their potential because of systematic issues such as difficulties in the accreditation of diplomas, lack of language, and distrust by the host community in their skills. It is critical for the humanitarian and development sector actors to recognize these facts and adapt their programmatic agendas to address them as much as possible within the limits of their resources.



*None of the cited reports in this SDR study belong to the DEEP 2021 ESN IFRC Turkey Project, nor do their opinions and arguments necessarily reflect the official views of IFRC Turkey as an institution.*

*Photo credit for all the photos in this report: IFRC.*

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/CocukHaklari/Raporlar/Precarious\\_Labour\\_Under\\_Lockdown.pdf](https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/CocukHaklari/Raporlar/Precarious_Labour_Under_Lockdown.pdf)

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