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SSN

THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET *Programme*



Exploring Labour Market Participation and It's Challenges

3rd Round of Focus Group Discussion Report

Dec'24



KIZILAYKART
Cash Based Assistance
Programmes



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TABLE OF CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
INTRODUCTION	3
Background.....	3
KEY FINDINGS	4
METHODOLOGY	5
Research Design.....	5
Data Collection and Sampling	5
Geographical Coverage	6
FINDINGS	7
Demographic Characteristics	7
The Impact of Cash Assistance.....	9
Covering Essential Needs.....	9
Adverse Effects on Recipients	10
Livelihoods and Working Conditions.....	11
Comparing Opinions on Formal and Informal Employment.....	13
Preference of Informal Employment.....	13
Participating in Formal Employment and It's Challenges.....	15
How Different Cities Influence Participation in Formal Employment...	18
Suggestions from Recipients for Enhancing Formal Employment.....	19
CONCLUSION	20
REFERENCES	21



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C-ESSN	Complementary Emergency Social Safety Net
ESSN	Emergency Social Safety Net
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ISKUR	Turkish Employment Agency
ILO	International Labor Organization
IP	International Protection
KIGEP	The Formality Transition Program
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
SGK	Social Security Institution of Türkiye
SSN	Social Safety Net
SuTPs	Syrians under Temporary Protection
TP	Temporary Protection

Executive Summary



The SSN Programme provides cash assistance to approximately 1.5 million recipients under Temporary Protection. One of the main objectives of the programme is to ensure the economic resilience and empowerment of recipients. SSN recipients who have difficulty finding regular work are often forced to turn to informal labour. However, in the long run, working in informal employment increases the vulnerability of SSN recipients. This study comparatively explores the perspectives of SSN recipients on formal and informal employment and the obstacles they encounter for both employment status. The findings probes into the reasons behind SSN recipients' inclination towards informal employment not only to meet the criteria for receiving cash assistance but also because of other economic and social factors. Recommendations from recipients at the end of the report shed light on how to increase the orientation towards formal employment as a pathway to safer and longer-term employment and contribute to improve the overall employment landscape among SSN recipients.

Introduction

Background

This research explores the differences between formal and informal jobs comparatively from the viewpoint of the Social Safety Net (SSN) recipients, revealing why many prefer informal work. Even though formal jobs offer legal safety and more stability, various hurdles including legal challenges and social biases, prevent people from working in formal sectors. Employees, employers and Syrian employers all have different perspectives on formal work. For employees, the issues include the lengthy wait to obtain a work permit and a desire to continue receiving cash assistance as it is one of the conditions for benefiting from the SSN Programme. For Syrian employers, the main issue is high costs to establish and operate a formal business. On local employers, there's often a reluctance to go through the process of applying for work permits for foreign employees.

The issue of informal employment is prevalent among foreign workers under Temporary and International Protection in Türkiye. Syrian men under Temporary Protection in Türkiye are 84 per cent less likely than their local counterparts to hold formal employment positions.¹ While over 1 million Syrians are estimated to work informally without legal protections, only 108,520 work permits were issued to Syrians as of 2023, with 94 per cent having granted to men.² Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTPs) can apply for a work permit using their Temporary Protection Identification Card, as regulated by the 2016 Work Permit Regulation. Applications can be made for free (as of 2023) after six months of receiving temporary protection status, either by employers through E-Government or directly by recipients for self-employment.³ However, formal employment is valid as long as individuals remain in the same province. In case of any change of address, formal employment has to be renewed.⁴ As a result, this focus group discussion report illuminates the multifaceted challenges impeding the transition from informal to formal employment among the SSN recipients in Türkiye, spotlighting the economic, legal, and socio-political barriers.

1 Demirci, Murat and Güray Kırdar, Murat, THE LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY, Economic Research Forum, Working Paper No. 1588 September 2022.

2 Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, Work Permits of Foreigners, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-turkey> accessed 22 December 2024.

3 Regulation on Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection. <https://www.calismaizni.gov.tr/media/93221/gkss-uygulama-rehberi> accessed 3 December 2024.

4 Demirci, Murat and Güray Kırdar, Murat, THE LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY, Economic Research Forum, Working Paper No. 1588 September 2022.

Key Findings

- Many recipients participate in informal employment because it allows them to remain eligible for free access to health services even if informal jobs offer less security and more precarious working conditions.
- Regardless of formal or informal jobs, participants frequently encounter challenges in their workplace such as; lower wages, working longer hours, and irregular-payment of salaries.
- Travel permits and address registration restrictions make working conditions harder.
- Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of formal employment, recipients encounter obstacles when attempting to access to formal jobs such as employers' reluctance to offer formal employment, the protracted and complex process associated with obtaining work permits, language barriers and vocational proficiency limitations.
- Larger cities like İstanbul and Gaziantep offer more informal job opportunities compared to smaller cities, yet barriers to formal employment remain consistent across all cities in Türkiye.
- The recipients gravitate towards unskilled jobs within the construction, textile, agriculture and manufacturing sectors. Meanwhile, individuals with educational backgrounds or professional competencies aim for high-skilled jobs, but often face obstacles related to the accreditation of their qualifications.
- Higher educational levels increase recipients preference' for formal employment, highlighting the need to expand education and vocational training opportunities to assist them integrate into the formal labour market.
- Recipient suggestions to improve formal employment participation opportunities include maintaining SSN assistance for employed recipients, simplifying work permit processes, offering legal and financial incentives for employers, increasing vocational and language training, and improving awareness on social security rights.



Methodology

Research Design

The research utilized a qualitative methodology through the implementation of focus group discussions (FGDs). Focus group studies collect information from a compact and varied assembly of individuals engaged in a moderated group conversation.⁵ The overall study design, including the preparation of the discussion guide, data collection, analysis and reporting were led by the Türk Kızılay Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Team.

Data Collection and Sampling

The study took place in October 2024, involving 121 SSN recipients (59 male and 62 female) from seven provinces. To select the participants, a simple random sampling method was employed. For each province, the respondents were divided into two separate groups based on their gender. Prior to initiating the data collection process, a refresher and informational session was held, aimed at refining the questions and integrating feedback from field staff. The FGD data collection and moderation was made by Türk Kızılay field staff. These discussions were conducted in person, with Türk Kızılay's expert moderators leading the sessions at the organization's Community Centres across the selected locations.



To accommodate the respondents' language preferences, discussions were conducted in Arabic, their native language. The Türk Kızılay team diligently transcribed the discussions, utilizing notes taken throughout the sessions for accuracy. For the data analysis, Türk Kızılay's Monitoring and Evaluation staff adopted qualitative content analysis techniques, employing the MAXQDA Program to analyze these transcriptions systematically.

⁵ Rabiee, Fatemeh. 2004. "Focus-Group Interview and Data Analysis." *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 63(4): 655–60. doi: 10.1079/PNS2004399.

Geographical Coverage

The FGDs were conducted in 7 provinces namely; İstanbul, İzmir, Gaziantep, Kayseri, Bursa, Adana, and Kilis. Selection of these provinces was guided by two main criteria: population size and the rate of job placements among recipients, aligning with the focus group discussion (FGD) theme of understanding tendencies to formal employment.

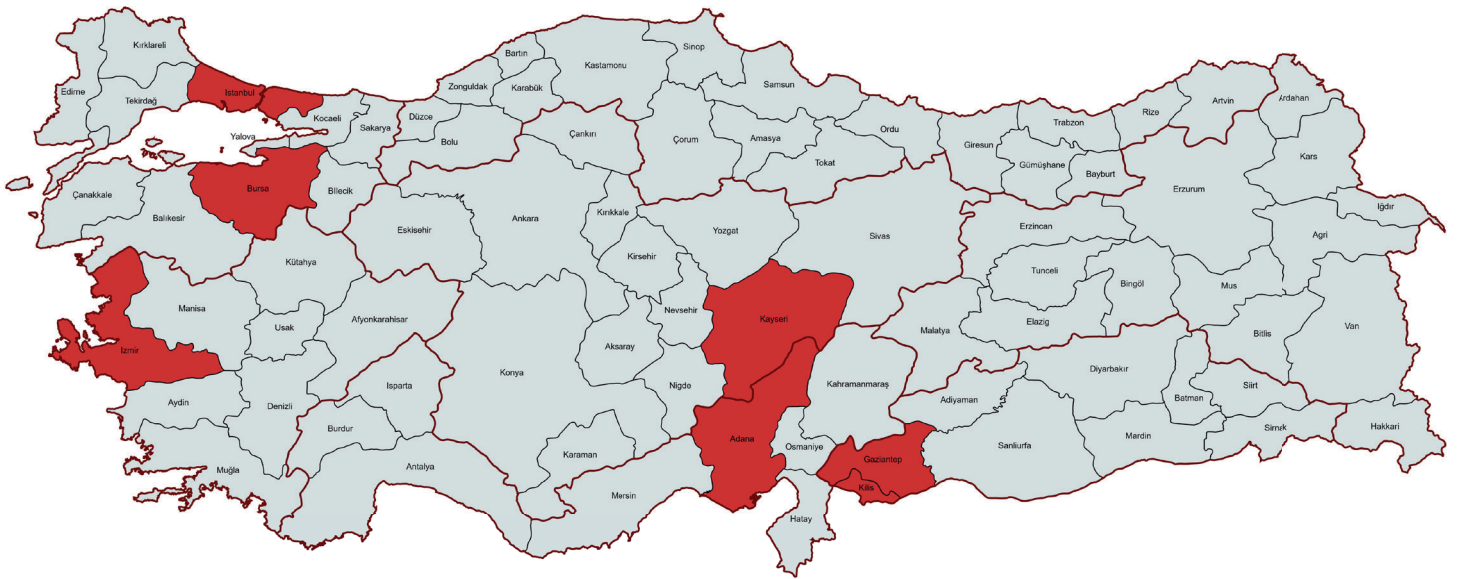


Figure 1 Focus Group Discussion Provinces

Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 121 participants, including 59 men and 62 women. The majority of the participants were married and 64 per cent were between 30 and 50 age years old, representing the largest age group. 23 per cent were above 50 years of age aged 18-30, while 13 per cent were young adults. This indicates that the focus group discussions reflected the perspectives of participants in their middle age, though inputs from younger and older age groups were also represented.

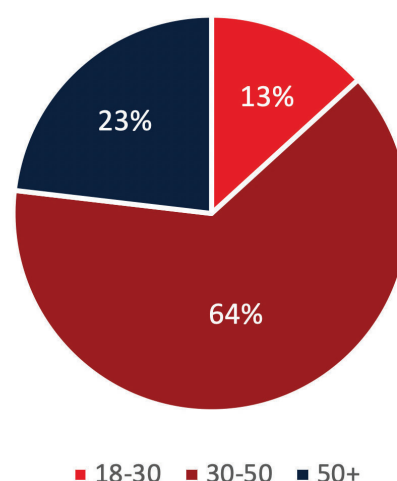


Figure 2 Age of Distribution of Participants

The majority of the participants reported having completed elementary school education, making it the most common level of attainment among the group. This was followed by those who had graduated from middle school, while high school graduates ranked third. 10 per cent of the participants were illiterate with no formal education. 2 per cent had completed university, which, although representing a smaller share, highlights the presence of participants with educational backgrounds.

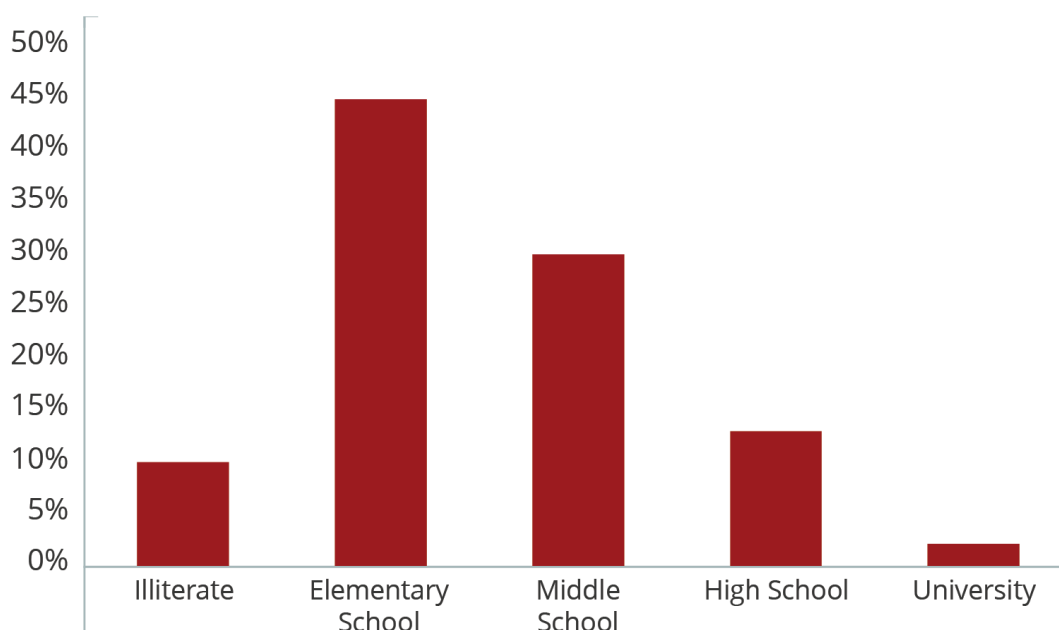


Figure 3 Educational Background of the Participants

Comparing the employment status of male and female participants reveals a notable disparity: more than half of the male participants are employed, whereas a significantly smaller proportion of female participants hold jobs (as shown in Figure 4-5). Among male participants, it has been observed that those with disabilities and those over the age of 50 face difficulties in finding employment. For female participants, the primary issue seems to be lack of work experience and professional skills.

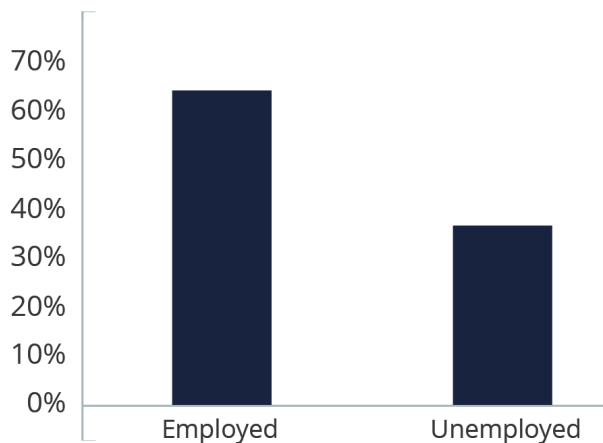


Figure 4 Employment Status of the Male Participants

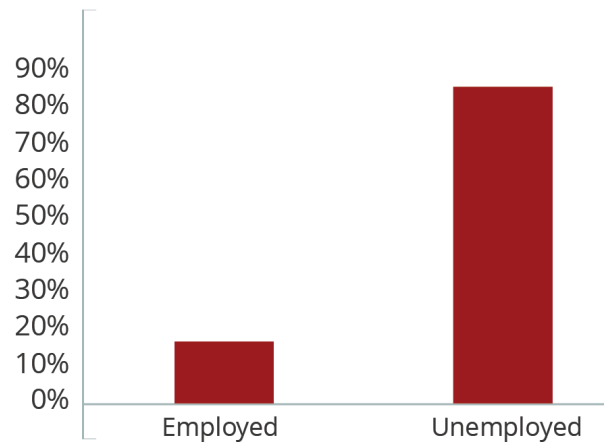


Figure 5 Employment Status of the Female Participants

Among the male respondents, those who are over the age of 50 and persons with disabilities reported an inability to work. Although the average age of participants in Kilis province ranges between 30 and 50, a majority indicated they were unemployed. This suggests a lower level of labour force participation in Kilis province. On the other hand, female respondents in İstanbul province were more likely to be employed, albeit in irregular jobs. The focus group interviews conducted in İstanbul, Gaziantep, and Bursa revealed that female participants were more informed about the distinctions between formal and informal employment. In large cities like İstanbul, Gaziantep, and İzmir, an increase in labour force participation was noted during these focus groups. Participants from both genders mentioned that their employment typically involved irregular and unskilled work. The sectors with the highest levels of labour force participation were identified as construction, textiles, manufacturing, agriculture, and the auto industry.

The Impact of Cash Assistance Covering Essential Needs

The elevated consumer prices in Türkiye causes persistent pressures on both supply and demand, as it becomes more difficult to access goods and services various sectors.⁶ The rising costs are alarming for 1.5 million ESSN and C-ESSN recipients who rely on SSN cash assistance. Economically vulnerable recipients are more at risk as economic fluctuations negatively affect their ability to access necessities such as basic food items. It was found in this focus group discussion that the cash assistance is utilized especially to help cover their rent and utility expenses by both male and female participants. However, the assistance serves merely as a supportive element and does not fully encompass the total costs of rent and utilities. Following rent and utilities, expenditures related to health and education were also highlighted. A few participants noted other uses for the assistance, including transportation costs, child diapers, food expenses, etc. Consequently, the participants emphasized that covering their most basic needs getting harder day by day given the inflation in Türkiye.

Month	Coverage Ratio C-ESSN	Coverage Ratio ESSN
Jan-24	18.8%	17.0%
Feb-24	17.8%	16.1%
Mar-24	17.2%	15.7%
Apr-24	16.9%	15.4%
May-24	16.4%	14.9%
Jun-24	15.8%	14.5%
Jul-24	15.0%	13.7%
Aug-24	14.4%	13.2%
Sep-24	13.6%	12.6%
Oct-24	13.2%	12.2%
Nov-24	12.7%	11.8%

As the Monthly MEB (Minimum Expenditure Basket) Coverage ratio indicated, the coverage ratios for both C-ESSN and ESSN show a consistent decline from January to November 2024, with C-ESSN dropping from 18.8% to 12.7% and ESSN decreasing from 17.0% to 11.8%. This downward trend reflects a steady reduction in coverage over the 11-month period for both beneficiary groups.

Figure 6 Monthly MEB Coverage Ratio of C-ESSN and ESSN Recipients

⁶ Consumer Price Index. TURK STAT. (2024, September). <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Consumer-Price-Index-September-2024-53618>.



“Sometimes, when we go to withdraw cash from ATMs, we receive negative comments from local people. We withdraw our money from ATMs that are empty to avoid these unwelcome comments.”



Female, Adana

“When I went to the furniture store to buy a product and wanted to negotiate, owner of the shop refused to help me by mentioning that I receive cash assistance. This made me feel bad.”



Female, Kayseri

Adverse Effects on Recipients

Negative attitudes towards refugees are often rooted in the economic concerns of the local population in cities where especially Syrian populations reside. Misconceptions such as foreign populations driving up rent prices, taking jobs away, and receiving disproportionate state support are contributing to increasing distance towards them. A significant portion of the local population believes that refugees make cities less safe and harm the Turkish economy.⁷ When asked about any adverse effects stemming from being SSN recipients, the participants indicated that they face criticism from Turkish citizens who believe the government favours them with support. Specifically, troubles were highlighted during the withdrawal of assistance from ATMs, prompting some beneficiaries to delay withdrawals for two days to avoid any conflict. Additionally, certain participants have chosen not to disclose their receipt of SSN assistance fearing rent hikes by landlords or wage cuts by employers. Also, some participants emphasized that receiving cash assistance hinders them from simultaneously applying for in-kind assistance.

7 Çalışkan A. and Kaya G., A Qualitative Examination of the Reasons for the Reality of Social Tension Experienced by Syrians Under Temporary Protection, Journal of Social Policy Conferences JSPC 2023, 85 , 99–116 DOI: 10.26650/jspc.2023.85.1317608,2023.

Livelihoods and Working Conditions

Participants do not consider the cash assistance as a deterring factor from participating in the labour force or seeking employment. Instead, the assistance is regarded as a support in the absence of any other income sources. However, male participants are particularly cautious about disclosing their receipt of cash assistance to their employers, indicating a concern over potential negative repercussions or judgments in the workplace. Given the unemployment rate in Türkiye (8,6 per cent)⁸, Turkish citizens see foreign populations as competition in the job market as they are more frequently employed in low-skilled jobs compared to Turkish citizens, due to their low education levels and younger population.



“

I have been working in a bakery here for ten years. I am forced to work because the cash assistance is not sufficient. It only covers my children's school expenses. I face unequal treatment at my workplace, and it upsets me. I have taken Turkish courses to improve myself and, despite having two diplomas, I cannot find an appropriate job. I am waiting for Türk Kızılay to develop programs directed towards employing women aside from cash support. Because we need moral support much more than financial help.”



**Female,
İstanbul**

⁸ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı, İstihdam, Accessed December 2024 ,3 , <https://www.sbb.gov.tr/istihdam/>



“People around me say you are living for free in this country. But that’s not the case; we are very upset. My co-workers and neighbours say you are living better than us, taking the help that we should be receiving.”



Male, Bursa

Recipients of the SSN generally find themselves employed in jobs that pay at or below the minimum wage. Additionally, their employment status tends to be irregular, often characterized by unskilled positions. The initial Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) report of the SSN Programme revealed that the median income level of households enrolled in the C-ESSN is lower than those in the ESSN. Specifically, the median income for C-ESSN households stands at 14,500, which is below the minimum wage, whereas for ESSN households, the median income is 17,000, equivalent to the minimum wage. When investigating their income sources, around 60 per cent of the recipients stated dependency on unskilled labour.⁹ **Almost half of the male participants reported that receiving cash assistance had no impact on their employment situation, suggesting that they continued to work irrespective of the working conditions.** Some participants mentioned avoiding informal or formal jobs because they received cash assistance, and even concealed their receipt of cash assistance from employers. Participants who could not work in any job mentioned that the assistance had an important positive effect. Although the majority of female participants could not express a clear opinion because they could not work, those who worked irregularly stated that the assistance had a positive effect when they could not work.

Besides receiving cash assistance, being granted international or temporary protection status significantly influences the working conditions of the recipients. Participants have often stated that they were subjected to negative treatment by the employer or in the work environment. For example, they have expressed that they receive lower wages due to their status, worked longer hours, and even sometimes emphasized that they did not receive their wages, and sometimes hardly find a job. In addition, participants have mentioned that sometimes they were subjected to negative remarks by their Turkish colleagues in the workplace or experienced conflicts.

⁹ Türk Kızılay KIZILAYKART Monitoring and Evaluation Team, Post-Distribution Monitoring Report(PDM), December 2024, Unpublished.

Comparing Opinions on Formal and Informal Employment

The vast majority of the SNN recipients work in unskilled and informal jobs, usually in small or medium-sized enterprises, as they consist of young people who, viewing social security risks (such as old age, illness, disability, etc.) as distant probabilities, unconsciously opt to work without insurance. Another reason is that due to the limited scope and inadequacies of the social security system in their own country, some might assume the conditions in Türkiye to be the same.¹⁰ This section illuminates the factors contributing to the diminished engagement of SNN recipients in formal employment, detailing the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. In particular, the perspectives of SNN recipients' on both types of formal and informal employment were evaluated in a comparative manner.

Preference of Informal Employment

The informal employment rate of Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTPs) is on the rise, especially in small-scale enterprises, particularly in the garment sector which exhibits a rate of informality of 38.5 per cent when including SuTPs and 30.4 per cent excluding them.¹¹ In an informal job, working longer hours, irregular payment of salaries and working for lower wages are mentioned as the most common difficulties encountered by foreign workers compared to their local colleagues. On the other hand, some participants in focus group discussion expressed positive sides of working informally as follows; **they mentioned that there are more informal jobs, which they can find faster and more easily. Working in informal jobs allows people to switch jobs more easily, which can lead to shorter periods of unemployment. Also, there is no requirement such as experience or a certificate of mastery in informal jobs.**



“For SNN recipients, informal jobs are more suitable. Due to health expenses not being covered when insured, working without insurance is preferred.”



Male, Gaziantep

¹⁰ Social Security Status of Syrians Under Temporary Protection in the Turkish Labour Market and Recommendations for Transition to Formality, International Labour Organization – Ankara, 2023 ISBN: 9789220390207 (web PDF).

¹¹ Pinedo-Caro, L. (2020), “Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market: A Socio-Economic Analysis”, *Sosyoekonomi*, Vol. 28(46), 51-74.



“Employers pay higher salaries to informal workers since they don’t need to pay the cost of insurance. But of course, formal jobs are safer.”



Male, İstanbul

“Working in an informal job does not affect any situation. Since we do not know when we will go, I think insurance will not be beneficial. There’s a high chance that we might not be able to retire.”



Female, İstanbul

One of the main reasons program recipients prefer informal jobs is to continue their eligibility for cash assistance. Even though, the assistance is not enough to cover their minimum needs, when there are no other sources of income, it is seen as a basis to reach their essential needs. Moreover, individuals under IP or TP can benefit from health and medical services for free if they have no work insurance. This is seen as an important reason for preferring informal employment. However, employers in formal jobs generally deduct the cost of insurance premiums from the salaries of individuals under IP and TP. Therefore, participants have stated that they can earn more salary in an informal job while accessing services for free.

A portion of participants has mentioned that being a refugee means that working in formal or informal jobs does not make any difference. For example, they see that they will still face bias such as redundancy, long working hours or that they will not have rights such as pension in the future. No matter the working hours or salaries, participants’ sole purpose is to meet the basic needs of their families.

In Türkiye, SuTPs generally work in construction and production sectors due to the employment deficit in textile, clothing, leather and footwear professions and the competition for cheap labour.¹² During the male focus group discussion sessions, it emerged that participants most frequently work informally in the construction sector, followed by tailoring, and textile industry ranking as the third category. Many participants mentioned that irrespective of the profession, they would take on any job. However, it is important to highlight that job preferences vary significantly by city. For instance, while furniture making is highly favoured in Kayseri, textile manufacturing predominates in Bursa. When questioned about their preferred type of job if given the chance to work formally, women participants expressed a preference for professions such as cooking and tailoring. On the other hand, men did not indicate a specific profession but mentioned a diverse range of trades, including being an electrician, driver, shoemaker, and printer. It can be concluded that as long as the recipients have no vocational skills, their job preferences won’t change. However, educated and/or professionally competent recipients stated that they would use their skills in formal employment through high-skilled jobs.

¹² Pinedo-Caro, L. (2020), “Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market: A Socio-Economic Analysis”, *Sosyoekonomi*, Vol. 28(46), 51-74.

Participating in Formal Employment and It's Challenges

As educational attainment increases, participation in formal employment rises in parallel among the refugee population in Türkiye. Awareness about the Social Security System and its advantages is very low among SuTPs and IPs.¹³ A significant proportion of participants expressed a preference for formal jobs, highlighting several key advantages as follows; **they noted that formal employment offers better protection of legal rights, including regular working hours, consistent wages, long-term job, annual leave right and no reduction in wages due to health issues.** Furthermore, the participants underlined that they can receive their overtime payment in formal jobs. Additionally, in the event of a work-related accident, formal employees have access to health assistance and various types of support. In terms of employee-employer relationship, specifically for redundancy issue, formal jobs are more preferred. Moreover, when they work informally, they are unable to take advantage of different job opportunities because if they want to work in a different province, they must obtain a travel permit. If they had been employed in formal jobs, they would not have faced this issue. For example, a participant residing in Gaziantep has stated that he could not work temporarily in a job available in Mersin. Therefore, he remained unemployed during certain periods.

¹³ Social Security Status of Syrians Under Temporary Protection in the Turkish Labour Market and Recommendations for Transition to Formality, International Labour Organization – Ankara, 2023 ISBN: 9789220390207 (web PDF).



“In jobs with insurance, there is continuity, and you have rights. You receive your full salary. Without insurance, we cannot claim our rights. The employer makes deductions from our pay or puts us in a difficult situation by paying us partially”



Female, Adana

“Legally, having insurance grants you more rights. If you get sick or have an accident, all your expenses are covered, and there is no deduction from your salary. Without insurance, working hours are much longer. They let us know they can call us whenever there’s work available, saying, “There’s no work this week; we’ll call you when there is.”



Female, Adana



“My spouse is a tailor. I would really like him to work in a job with insurance, but the employer doesn’t provide insurance coverage. They tell us they can provide insurance, but it will be deducted from our salary.”



Female, Adana

Despite the participants’ desire to engage in formal employment, the decision to choose informal vs. formal work is not entirely in control of the foreign populations. Legal obstacles might encompass restrictive requirements for securing work permits, elevated expenses associated with acquiring work permits, bans on employment in specific sectors, and constraints like the ban on owning a business, possessing immovable property, and restricted access to credit.¹⁴

The male participants stressed that the most significant challenge arises from employers’ resistance to offering insurance, coupled with their attempts to obscure the employment status of workers from auditors of the Social Security Institution (SGK). Some projects have been initiated to mitigate this issue. For example, The Formality Transition Program (KIGEP) is conducted in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Türkiye Office, the Turkish Social Security Institution (SGK), and the Directorate General for International Labour Force under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The programme aims to support employers in 16 different cities in Türkiye to provide social security assistance to their employees. The 2022 data reveals that 20.000 employees under 2000 employers were supported in the scope of the project.¹⁵ However, similar kind of projects should be disseminated to mitigate risks such as work accidents, occupational diseases, and unemployment of the SuTPs and IPs.

14 Vasja Badalič (2023) Trapped in the underground economy: Syrian refugees in the informal labour market in Turkey, *Third World Quarterly*, 44:5, 967-984, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2023.2170224.

15 Social Security Status of Syrians Under Temporary Protection in the Turkish Labour Market and Recommendations for Transition to Formality, International Labour Organization – Ankara, 2023 ISBN: 9789220390207 (web PDF).

Additionally, the complexity and duration of the work permit process (6 months) posed another challenge, preventing participants from obtaining necessary work permits. A majority of participants expressed strong criticisms regarding these issues. Participants stated that these processes need to be made easier and. Participants have also emphasized that because they cannot work in formal jobs, they struggle to find regular employment. The participants who have professional qualifications stated that they could not work in formal jobs due to the accreditation issue. In particular, those in the teaching profession have raised this problem. Also, some participants indicated that they would start their own business but the heavy taxes don't allow them. Finally, numerous participants highlighted that their advanced age, health issues, discrimination, limited language proficiency, lower levels of education and childcare responsibilities prevent them from participating in formal employment opportunities.



“

“Formal employment demands proficiency and often requires training. This demand pushes us towards informal jobs. For me, the preferable option is certainly formal employment. At the very least, you have legal rights. You receive your salary in full and on time.”



Female, Gaziantep

“My husband had opened a greengrocer's shop. The rents were so high that he had to close the shop because of the rent. Now he goes to the markets. We would have liked to keep our place and continue with insurance.”



Female, Kilis



"I work four months a year. I am a seasonal agricultural worker. It would have been good if I had a work permit; I am required to get a travel permit, and I have to go through the same procedures every time."



Male, Gaziantep

"I believe İstanbul is better for finding a job but it doesn't matter whether it's formal or informal work. Yes, İstanbul is expensive, but there are more job opportunities and higher salaries too."



Male, İstanbul

"I am a tailor, I sew children's clothing. I need to go to Kahramanmaraş to buy fabric, but I can't go because I am unable to obtain a road permit"



Male, Gaziantep

How Different Cities Influence Participation in Formal Employment

Participants were asked about how living in their city affected the opportunities to work in a formal job. Despite the majority of participants stating that larger cities offer more employment opportunities, barriers to working in a formal job remained unchanged as mentioned above. In other words, even if they lived in larger cities, they would still have to opt for informal employment. Even if they receive a work permit, the existing work permits become invalid in case any address or work place changes, requiring updates to their work permits. Participants even feared deportation when they wished to work in different cities. This legal process deter foreign individuals to switch the city they currently reside in.¹⁶ Participants living in Gaziantep and İstanbul mentioned experiencing fewer difficulties in finding informal work. Those residing in Kilis reported that job opportunities were very limited in their area, which made them want to work in larger cities, but they could not do so because they were unable to obtain the necessary travel permissions.

In large cities such as İstanbul and Gaziantep, the employment rate of SuTPs is higher than in smaller cities in the Southeast region due to the dominance of the manufacturing sector.¹⁷ PDM 1 Report reveal that income amount of recipients in Southeast region are lower than in İstanbul region.¹⁸ Despite larger cities like İstanbul providing more job opportunities, the cost of living was higher. In conclusion, as long as the necessary legal regulations are not implemented to direct individuals under IP or TP to formal employment, living in cities with more job opportunities does not change the situation.

16 Vasja Badalič (2023) Trapped in the underground economy: Syrian refugees in the informal labour market in Turkey, Third World Quarterly, 44:5, 967-984, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2023.2170224.

17 Demirci, Murat and Güray Kırdar, Murat, THE LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY, Economic Research Forum, Working Paper No. 1588 September 2022.

18 Türk Kızılay, 2nd Round of Post-Distribution Report, December 2024, Unpublished.

Suggestions from Recipients for Enhancing Formal Employment

In response to the question of what supports should be provided to increase formal employment, the vast majority of participants stated that working in a formal job should not be an obstacle from receiving the SSN assistance. **Even though, the assistance does not fully cover their basic needs such as rent and utilities, in case of unemployment the assistance is perceived as an exit strategy.** Secondly, the need for an accelerated process for obtaining work permits was highlighted. The complex and lengthy legal procedures can discourage people from seeking formal employment. The participants emphasized the need for legal incentives aimed not just at foreign individuals but also at their employers. Additionally, increasing vocational and language training emerged as one of the top suggestions. In order to participate in high-skilled jobs for educated and vocationally competent SSN recipients, learning and practising Turkish language gives a chance to use their professional competence. Considering that women's participation in the labour force is more difficult and less preferred, female participants specifically pointed out that there should not be a requirement for professional experience to participate in formal employment. Lastly, it was noted that recipients often lack sufficient knowledge about the legal processes of formal employment, highlighting the need for stronger guidance efforts by Turkish authorities. Social security rights and obligations should be clearly communicated, and targeted information sessions should be organized to address this gap.



Conclusion

The SSN Programme provides essential support to vulnerable populations in Türkiye but struggles to keep pace with inflation and rising living costs. As a result, many recipients resort to informal employment to sustain their livelihoods. This reliance not only undermines the efforts to promote formal employment but also perpetuates cycles of vulnerability among SSN recipients. Government agencies, such as the Ministry of Family and Social Services (MoFSS) and the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), have taken steps to encourage formal employment by simplifying job registration processes and enabling faster relocation for SuTPs. While agricultural jobs are exempt from work permit requirements, extending similar exemptions to other sectors could help reduce barriers; however, such measures alone would be insufficient to achieve widespread formal employment.¹⁹

Findings from the 6th FGD Report (2022) reveal a consistent preference for unskilled labour and informal work among recipients. Problems encountered in informal employment, such as job insecurity, violation of employee rights, lack of protection for labour rights, longer working hours, and absence of rights in case of workplace accidents, are findings can be reached in both reports. Even though it is possible to see a positive belief toward formal jobs, remains out of reach for recipients due to systemic barriers such as lengthy work permit processes, employer resistance, and lack of vocational or language proficiency. It should be noted that the geographic location does not change reality of these barriers. These challenges are compounded by social tensions between the refugee and local population.

Overall, this study highlights the enduring economic and social pressures driving informal employment among SSN recipients. It underscores the urgent need for policies and practices that bridge the gap between cash assistance and self-sufficiency. While cash assistance may deter participation in formal employment to some extent, a comprehensive and multilateral evaluation of these dynamics is essential to develop effective, sustainable solutions.

¹⁹ Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey, Atlantic Council in Turkey, UNDP, July 2020.

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