



LIVELIHOOD EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEES LIVING IN TÜRKİYE

EMERGENCY SOCIAL SAFETY NET (ESSN) PROGRAMME

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MAIN FINDINGS

- 1** Findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) indicate limited access to job opportunities, with the accessible ones being irregular and precarious. The most mentioned sectors in the FGDs are textile manufacturing and construction.
- 2** Social networks are observed to be a critical factor in access to employment; the most common method of finding employment is through acquiring information from social circles that consist mainly of refugees¹ which include friends and acquaintances.
- 3** Employed individuals frequently change jobs and it is mainly related to low wages. The frequency of job changing can be seen as manifestation of impacts of employment under irregular and precarious conditions.
- 4** Among factors affecting employment related to context, such as policy structure, the most discussed issues are discrimination, not being able to obtain a work permit and related legal procedures, traditional gender roles, and the inability to provide diploma equivalency. Language barrier and advanced age are the most prominent factors related to individual profiles.
- 5** Most participants indicated that informal work is not a matter of preference but an obligation despite all disadvantages entailing such employment. When participants listed their reasons behind informal employment, the leading ones include employers being reluctant to acquire work permit, economic hardships households experience, and concerns about losing the ESSN coverage since ESSN assistance operates as a reliable economic support mechanism. When it comes to challenges at the workplace, participants referred to underpayment, no payment at all, irregular payment, and lack of job security. They also shared that such difficulties of informal employment can be overcome by formal employment where they can also benefit from fringe benefits as an additional advantage.
- 6** According to some participants, having a residence permit increases the likelihood of one to be hired, as well as expediting the whole employment process.
- 7** Regarding their future career plans, majority of participants mentioned that they would like to start their own business provided that work-related challenges are completely or partially eliminated.



¹ Refugee is referring to foreigners who are under international protection or temporary protection according to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Herein the term is used to refer to their legal status.

STUDY BACKGROUND

Türkiye hosts the largest refugee population of any country in the world, with 3.6 million Syrians registered under Temporary Protection (TP) and approximately 370,000 registered refugees under International Protection (IP) from other countries.² Enacted in 2016, the Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees under Temporary Protection provides Syrian refugees with the right to access work permits under certain conditions. According to this regulation, the Syrian refugees can apply for a work permit to access employment or to establish their own business, six months after registration of the temporary protection status of the individual. However, the individuals can file application with their place of residence and must not be previously granted a work permit.³ Furthermore, in order to be able to obtain a work permit, the workplace of the persons under TP shall employ at least 10 citizens of the Republic of Türkiye per person under TP. On the other hand, the persons under temporary protection can benefit from vocational training and employment assistance from the Turkish Employment Organization (ISKUR). The persons under IP can enjoy the rights and benefits of this legislation; however, to receive a work permit, there must be five local employees for each employee under IP in a workplace.



Despite efforts for ensuring access of the persons under TP or IP to the labor market, there are still challenges for the refugees in accessing employment and working in registered, formal work. According to official data, between 2016 and 2019, 132,497 Syrian refugees were granted work permits. However, it is estimated that approximately one million Syrian refugees are employed in informal work and approximately 1.8 million people under TP live under the poverty line in Türkiye.⁴ It is known that in terms of accessing employment, there are differences between challenges faced by persons under TP and IP that are based on sex, age, and sector. According to an analysis of a sampling consisting of 813,718 Syrian refugees, 71 per cent of males aged between 15 and 65 are employed whereas the ratio is merely 11.2 for the females of the same age group.⁵ Regarding age-related differences, it is seen that younger generations are more likely to access employment and obtain work permits compared to older ones.⁶ Examination of sector-based differences indicates that the most common fields of employment for Syrian refugees are commerce, production, and construction. Among these, especially the textile, clothing, leather, and footwear-production employ one-third of the persons under protection.⁷ In the light of these findings, it can be stated that more information is needed on access to employment and working conditions of the persons under TP and IP. Also, the factors directing persons to regular and informal works must be further studied to formulate the interventions needed in this field.

2 • <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

3 • <https://help.unhcr.org/Türkiye/information-for-syrians/livelihoods/>

4 • UNHCR Türkiye. (2021). "Türkiye - 3RP Country Chapter -2021/2022."pg. 7

5 • ILO. (2020). "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market." pg. 6

6 • TRC and WFP. (2019). "Refugees in Türkiye. Livelihoods Survey Findings."

7 • ILO. (2020). "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market." pg. 13

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Participants to the FGDs carried out in February 2022 were selected among the persons under temporary or IP residing in the provinces where the targeted groups accumulated the most: Gaziantep, Ankara, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir, Eskişehir, and Erzurum. A total of 23 out of 54 participants of the FGDs were recipients of ESSN whereas 31 of them were non-recipients. As for nationality, 44 participants were Syrian individuals under temporary protection, and 10 participants were Afghan individuals under international protection. Participants were divided into 10 focus groups based on recipient/non-recipient status of the ESSN or sex, and were assigned to random groups selected disregarding the educational background or age of the participant. Two focus group discussions were held; one with 11 male participants from households whose ESSN assistance was cut off due to acquiring work permits, another one with 10 persons (mix groups of ESSN recipients and non-recipients) under IP. The findings of the study do not fully represent the overall refugee population in Türkiye.

| Province | Number of Participants |
|-----------|------------------------|
| Gaziantep | 15 |
| Ankara | 13 |
| İstanbul | 10 |
| İzmir | 8 |
| Hatay | 5 |
| Eskişehir | 2 |
| Erzurum | 1 |
| Total | 54 |



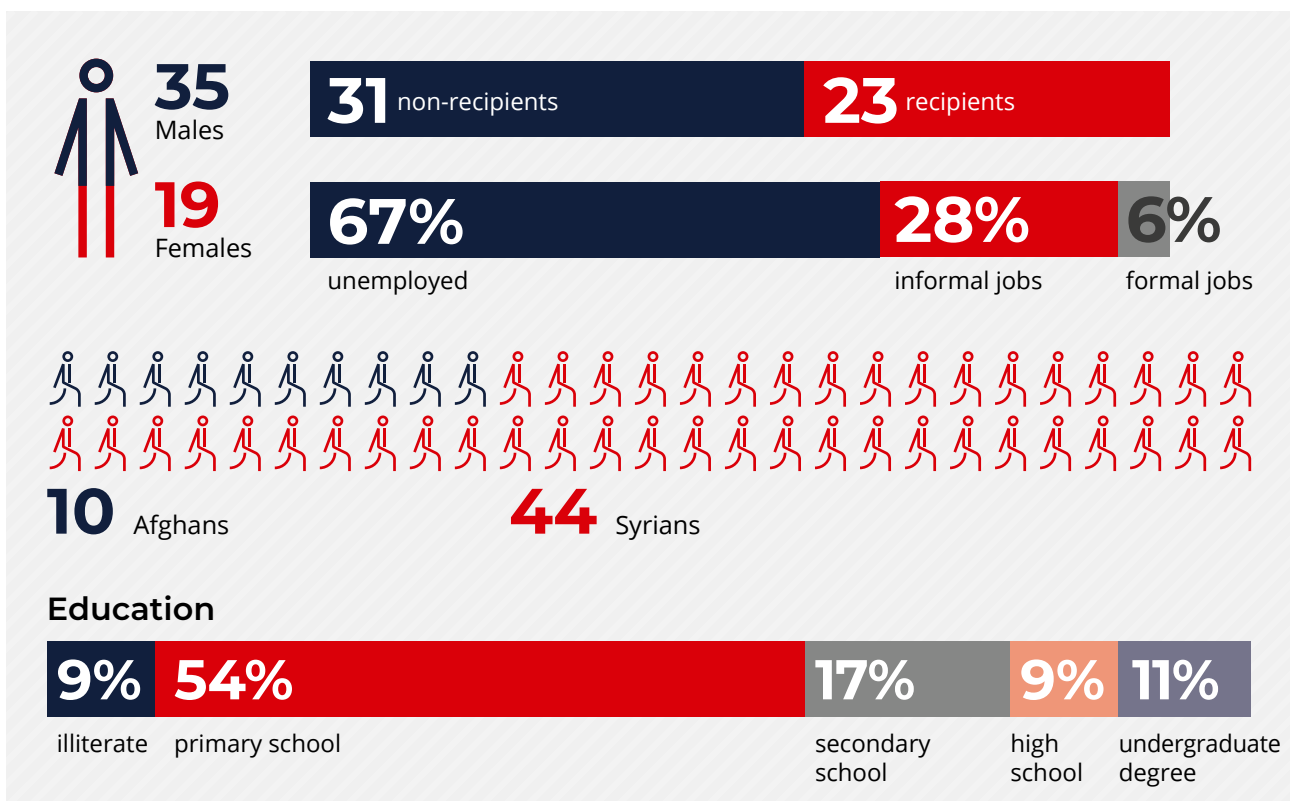
Data Collection and Analysis

Due to COVID-19, the FGDs under the ESN programme, have been held in the form of video conferences via online channels, using tablets, computers and smartphones, starting from June 2020. This mode of communication allowed participants from different regions to attend the same FGD sessions. First, selected individuals were contacted via 168 Turkish Red Crescent Call Centre to request participation and consent. Those who consented to participate were visited by field teams who delivered the devices to them adhering to physical distancing and hygiene rules during the discussion session which were held under supervision by expert moderators and clerks reporting the session.

Reports drawn by the clerks based on the notes taken during the discussion were checked against video records of the sessions which were transcribed by the Monitoring and Evaluation teams of the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC). Then, these transcripts were analyzed jointly by the TRC and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Monitoring and Evaluation teams using NVIVO software and turned into reports.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

19 of the 54 participants were female and 35 were male. Forty-four of the participants were Syrians and 10 were Afghans. The discussions were conducted in two languages: Arabic and Persian. While 43 per cent of the participants were recipients of the Kızılaykart programme 57 per cent were not. The median age of participants is 41; 4 per cent are aged between 18 to 24 years old, 91 per cent are aged between 25 to 59 years old and 5 per cent are aged 60 and older. It's important to note that 94 per cent of the participants were aged between 18-59 which is the main study focus. Regarding the education levels, 54 per cent of the participants are graduates of primary school whereas 11 per cent had an undergraduate degree. Four per cent of the participants received vocational training. The average number of household members among participants was 6, whereas the maximum number of members in a given household was 14. During the FGDs, 67 per cent of the participants stated that they were unemployed, 28 per cent were working in informal jobs, and 6 per cent were working in formal jobs. 66 per cent of the participants stated that they had worked before, and the remaining (34 per cent) stated that they had been employed before. The majority of those who had no work experience were women.



FINDINGS

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In general, the participants mentioned the availability of similar, albeit limited opportunities for employment, regardless of the TP or IP status.

The first topic of discussion was the availability of employment opportunities for the participants. In general, the participants mentioned the availability of similar, albeit limited opportunities for employment, regardless of the TP or IP status. The majority of participants referred to the irregularity of the available employment opportunities. This situation can be partially explained by the fact that most participants were primary schools graduates, but as will be explained in the later sections, the context has just as much impact as the characteristics of these individuals. Especially in groups consisting of female participants, it was observed that most of them were unemployed. These participants shared their observations and experiences regarding their husbands or male acquaintances' access to employment, rather than their own. According to participants, the two main fields of employment are manufacturing (especially textiles) and construction industries. This statement supports the finding that the three most common sectors are trade, manufacturing, and construction⁸. The sectors and jobs are listed the table below by how frequently they were referred to:

| Manufacturing (Textiles, furniture, upholstery) | Tailoring, irregular works in textile workshops, furniture businesses, etc. |
|--|--|
| Construction | Casual work, plastering, etc. |
| Elementary works | Junk dealing, waste recycling, portorage etc. |
| Accommodation-service sectors | Restaurant worker, market/grocery worker, etc. |
| Home-based work | Tailoring, embroidery, etc. |
| Artisan | Carpentry, carpet making, etc. |
| Agriculture | Seasonal works |
| Self-employed | Online marketing, interpreter |
| Other | Teacher, self-employed, factory worker, etc. |

8 • ILO. (2020). "Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market." pg. 13

“

Self-employed work is more common here. Grocery, greengrocery, and there are also those who perform handicrafts, like tailors, carpenters, and construction workers. I mean, people are trying to earn their keep, they work whatever job they can get.

– Male, non-recipient, Hatay

“

Switching between jobs? If my spouse was to change his job at the age of 45-46, no one would employ him. He can only find jobs in construction. He doesn't work regularly, either. It is like he can't find a job, or gets underpaid. But mostly, he doesn't work because the wage is too low for the effort. They don't want you, saying you're too old. And we are not doing well, madam.

– Female, ESSN recipient, Gaziantep

Home-based work was an option mentioned only for women. Works such as sewing and embroidery performed at home are supportive functions for the textile sector. Several participants stated that such works always pay very little. In addition, some female participants expressed an actual lack of employment opportunities, while some male participants indicated limited availability of employment opportunities in their area of residence.

METHODS FOR ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT

Most of the participants stated that their access to employment is usually through friends and acquaintances.

The most prominent finding of the focus group discussions regarding methods for accessing employment is the importance of social relations in accessing employment. Most of the participants stated that their access to employment is usually through friends and acquaintances. Individuals usually hear about available employment opportunities from the social circles of the refugees. The participants stated that they used multiple methods for accessing employment. Another common method is going from door to door and inquiring about available jobs directly in the workplace. This method was most commonly mentioned in focus groups consisting of male participants from households under temporary protection who have been excluded from ESSN upon finding regular employment. In addition, social media is also a tool used for accessing employment. Participants mentioned that they both searched job advertisements and that they posted their availability for work on social media. A participant under the IP stated the following about the process:

“

We mostly hear about it [employment opportunity] from our neighbors. Afghans usually crowd together, large numbers sharing a residence. They reside with other Afghans. For example, when we first arrived, some neighbors had been employed for many years. So, they would tell if any vacancy was available. That's how we learn about vacancies. So, we mostly hear [about it] from neighbors.

– Female, ESSN recipient, Ankara

A participant with a university degree recounted the job-seeking process:

“

Honestly, I've knocked a lot of doors, firstly looking for available jobs. I have searched around the social media and talked to my friends and family to find employment. Then I turned to social institutions, but I couldn't find a job. I have been looking for a job as a social or psychosocial consultant or as a general advisor in non-profit organizations because the qualifications they are looking for fall under my major. I couldn't find anything education-wise, so, at last, I started looking for jobs at factories. The wages they offer in factories are very low, and the working hours are too long and the work is exhausting, unfortunately. Working 12 hours a day and you cannot make a decent week's or month's wage.

– Male, non-recipient, Gaziantep

A small number of participants, mainly from Ankara, stated that waiting all day long in “laborer markets” is also a common method of accessing employment. These participants stated that they go to a particular place and wait to find casual jobs, and if an employer comes, they can work that day.

In the light of all this information, it can be stated that a social circle, where the news about employment opportunities arrives and is shared, is an important factor in seeking access to employment. Additionally, given the irregular and informal nature of available employment opportunities, the method for accessing employment is largely affected by this situation.

“

Actually, we also have our compatriots. We have acquaintances, too. They call us when there is a job and then we go and work. If they don't call, we got to the squares where laborers wait. If there is any work, then we work. If not, we stay at home. We also call others when there is an opportunity. But we do not just sit around always. When we do not hear about a job from others, we go to the square of laborers and wait there. Whatever job we can find, heavy or light, we accept the job and go do it.

– Male, ESSN recipient, İzmir



CHANGING JOBS

The frequency of changing between jobs is rather high mainly because of low wages. Impacts of irregular and precarious employment can be monitored in the mode of changing jobs.

According to the participants of the focus group discussions, the frequency of changing between jobs is rather high mainly because of low wages. Impacts of irregular and precarious employment can be monitored in the mode of changing jobs.

The majority of the participants stated that they or their acquaintances changed jobs four or more times. This supports the idea that the targeted population generally has access to only temporary and irregular jobs. The number of participants who stated that they do not change jobs is also high. However, upon further examination of the responses of the participants who stated “I don’t switch between jobs”, it is seen that these individuals practice the same occupation in different places/modes thus changing jobs even if they continue to practice the same occupation. The reason behind this situation is that the individual is not skilled in any other occupation.

“

I did not change my occupation. I work when there is a job, I am not capable of doing any other work.

– Male, ESSN recipient, Hatay

“

That’s my job and I’ve never changed it. I only changed my workplace. I work sometimes at schools, sometimes at the hospitals.

– Female, ESSN recipient, İstanbul

“

I have only worked as a cabinetmaker and nothing else. During my first employment, I worked for two years, then two more years at another business. When the second workplace went bankrupt, I was laid off from there too. I did not get what I was owed from these workplaces. Later, I worked under yet another person, but I became ill and quit there too. I haven’t worked regularly for about two years. But if there is an urgent need for someone with skill and expertise, they call me. Then I lend a hand. But this is not permanent. One day, I just got sick. I have a weak heart, high blood pressure, diabetes, you name it. I didn’t see them coming. I feel tired all the time, so I can’t just work any job.

– Male, non-recipient, İstanbul

Further examination of changing jobs based on gender revealed that the male participants change jobs more frequently than females. Moreover, unemployed female participants also provided information about access to employment by their husbands. Therefore, regarding the number of job changes in the male-female population, the results cannot be generalized by gender.

“

My husband constantly changes jobs. They said there were no jobs at the footwear shop so, he has been unemployed for a month.

– Female, ESSN recipient, İzmir

Regarding the reasons for changing jobs the participants most commonly pointed out ill pay as the main reason for changing jobs. The participants stated that the employees quit their jobs due to ill pay and always looking to switch to better-paying jobs. The second and third most common reasons for changing jobs are seasonal work and disputes over payment of dues, respectively. The participants stated that what available employment in construction, agriculture, or tailoring is seasonal and that the employment opportunities shrink to none during wintertime. Moreover, the participants claimed that they switch between jobs when the due wages are paid late, partially, and sometimes not paid at all.

“

Work is work, my brother. Pay is ill, though. When underpaid when they are offered only 400-500 Liras, for 800 TRY work, they switch jobs. – Male, non-recipient, Ankara

“

We came to Türkiye in 2018. In the first and second years, my husband jumped between jobs a lot. He worked here one week, there two weeks. The reason for this was that they did not pay him proper wages. And these works were very hard works, too. He was working for twelve hours, standing all the while. His knees hurt. They weren't paying on time. He worked in somewhere for a week and they didn't pay him anything. Now he works in painting and sanding [construction]. This is not an easier job, either. They don't give him any lunch. So, he brings his lunch along. And he is underpaid. The salaries increased⁹, but they don't increase his pay. – Female, ESSN recipient, Gaziantep

Other reasons include discrimination against refugees in the workplace and individual's poor health conditions albeit not as common. Few individuals stated that they were subjected to discrimination and quit their jobs due to uneasiness. Only participants aged 35 and over stated poor health conditions. Other and less common causes were the language barrier, long working hours, being overburdened due to being forced to perform duties not included in the job description, closure/bankruptcy of the workplace, and others (day-long working without breaks, not covering lunches, seeking a job that suits the individual's skills/profession, being laid off, moving residence, etc.).

“

It is about the pay you earn, making ends meet. Then the availability of opportunity, and only then the things that make you continue working. For instance, if you are underpaid, you ought to quit. Say, you are forced to work long hours, or your health gets poorer, and you still are underpaid, you don't want to work, you just quit. – Female, non-recipient, İstanbul

These findings indicate that even if participants of FGDs can find jobs, they do not work for a long time for many reasons, especially due to the irregular and precarious nature of available employment opportunities. In this respect, it can be stated that the employment of one or more individuals in a household does not necessarily translate into regular income.

9 • The respondent refers to the increase of salaries at the beginning of the new year

FACTORS AFFECTING ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT

The access to employment by a refugee can be affected not only by personal attributes but also by the context.

Findings indicated that the access to employment by a refugee can be affected not only by personal attributes but also by the context. The discussions focused mainly on employment by an employer at a workplace. The most common factors that affect access to employment by context are: discrimination, lack of work permits and legal procedures thereof, traditional gender roles, lack of accreditation, and language barriers especially in professional terminology.

The participants stated that they were subjected to negative reactions while looking for jobs as refugees and experience discrimination based on nationality on the workplace. These statements mostly came from male participants. This can be explained through the fact that usually it is the male individuals in these households that take up the role of earning. Since female individuals are either unemployed or doing home-based work, their likelihood to observe or experience such situations in workplaces is limited.

“

It is all about us being migrants. And racism. Racism among young people. Some people won't let us work. How can one explain this? If you're Syrian, they give you a job that they think fits a refugee. If you are a Turk, they give you a job that they deem fits a Turk. – Male, non-recipient, Ankara

The ESSN recipient participants offered more opinions on the subjects of not receiving a work permit and relevant legal procedures regarding it, as well as those under TP stated that in order to be able to legally work, one needs to reside in the same district with the workplace and other similar legal obligations affect access to employment¹⁰.

“

We are having issues because when we apply to any factory with this ID card, they say you are illegal immigrants and they do not employ us. They don't hire us for as long as they have other options. They employ us if it is the only option. So, we start working, one month, two months, tops. But then they lay us off. Also, if we have money, and start a business for ourselves, we don't encounter any problems. We can have an operating license just as same as Turkish citizens are granted one. We can set up our own business. But problems occur with factories or similarly paid jobs. There are a lot of jobs in the factories, but they don't give us jobs because of a lack of work permits. If we were to found a factory, any business, say a bakery, we can get an operating license and we can do that. – Male, ESSN recipient, Eskişehir

10 • Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection, Official Journal Publication Date 15/1/2016, No:29594, Article 7. <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/3.5.20168375.pdf>

ULUSLARARASI KORUMA BAŞVURU SAHİBİ VE ULUSLARARASI KORUMA STATÜSÜ SAHİBİ KİŞİLERİN ÇALIŞMASINA DAİR YÖNETMELİK, Official Journal Publication Date 26/4/2016, No:29695, Article: 6/4. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/04/20160426-1.htm>

“

If his residential address is İzmir, they employ him. But they are forbidden to work anywhere but İzmir, as it is their residence.

– Female, ESSN recipient, İzmir

“

In our community, girls do not work, they stay at home and care for their children. So they just don't work.

– Female, ESSN recipient, İzmir

“

If my children were older, I would work in a proper job.

– Female, ESSN recipient, Hatay

“

There are many factors, like chronic diseases, and physical disabilities. These are always obstacles but there are also those of working age. For us, for a lot of youth, and I am one of them, I have a degree in Islamic Theology. My diploma was not recognized; if my diploma had been recognized – the issue of equivalency - it would have been useful for me to get a job here in Türkiye and I could get employed. And not work in a different field but my expertise; yet, there are many obstacles in this matter.

– Male, ESSN recipient, Hatay

As a result of the analysis of factors on an individual basis, it was determined that the most common factors are the language barrier and the inability to access employment due to advanced age. Even though the answers to the question of which professions need what level of proficiency in the Turkish language varied, some participants stated that fluency in the Turkish language is not equally significant for all professions. Examination of answers concerning the language barrier on a gender basis, it was observed that both male and female participants specified it as a hindrance.

“

Of course, the most important thing is language, the other one is diploma [equivalence]. These are the utmost necessities for a job. If someone does not have these, it will affect their job-finding chance very much. These are the most important things.

– Female, non-recipient, Ankara

The impact of traditional gender roles on access to employment is also one of the problems stated during the discussion. Participants who raised this issue are exclusively female. Some participants stated that they could not work due to childcare responsibilities they assumed whereas a small number of participants stated that they did not work because traditionally it is up to men to provide for the household's livelihood. Some participants stated that they would like to work if their children were older or if they had their own workplace.

Lack of accreditation, in other words, not being able to get equivalence for diploma degrees is one of the factors that impede access to employment. Participants stated that even if they have degrees, they cannot work in their area of expertise due to the fact that these diplomas are not recognized for various reasons.

In addition to the answers mentioned above, a small number of participants stated that in their culture it is not appropriate to make people over a certain age work and this is the reason for their inability to access employment.

“

Brother, I'm actually an electrical and plumbing technician. But the language is very big problem for me. Otherwise, I would like to set up a business. I have this really good work experience. But the language barrier and lack of capital impede this to a great extent. So, it doesn't look likely.

– Male, non-recipient, Ankara

In addition to the language barrier, a large number of participants stated that they could not access employment due to age-related reasons. Participants stated that younger persons are favored for employment and have more opportunities in accessing employment, while people who are relatively older have difficulties. The above-mentioned age range is approximately 45 and older. Some participants even stated that after a certain age people have no chance of accessing regular, formal employment. In addition to these, lack of qualifications in a given profession is also one of the leading factors that impede accessing employment. The participants who raised the problems related to diploma equivalence and qualifications were mostly female.

“

In truth, there is a lot of jobs here. Textile shops have a lot of jobs, but they want young people. They want people under-30s, even younger I mean. Those who are older, like me, get jobs like portage, and casual work. That's how it is...

– Male, ESSN recipient, Gaziantep

“

Age is an important factor in finding a job. When a person gets older, they cannot find a job. They have limited access to employment opportunities. Expertise and language are very important too. We didn't have the opportunity to learn the language because our situation was very bad after we arrived here from Syria. We could not attend the language courses due to financial problems. As soon as we arrived, we sought jobs so that we could survive. I have to look after a child and a household. If we didn't have such responsibilities, we would attend language courses.

– Male, non-recipient, Gaziantep

Experience-skill is also one of the qualities needed for accessing employment. The majority of participants who raised the experience-skill as a factor were male. This can be interpreted as the fact that men have to work and that the problems related to experience-skill play an important role in their lives, while women are mostly engaged in domestic labor. It also supports context-based examination. In addition, some participants stated that they could not work due to physical health problems or disabilities. It can be said that the commonly available jobs indicated during the discussions mostly require physical effort thus an able and strong body which might have influenced the frequency of responses about not being able to access employment due to both health problems and advanced age.

“

Above all, lack of a degree, any qualification, and poor health are the problems that affect [access to employment] it. For example, the barrier of culture and language of the society [also affects access to employment]. You see, now? I mean, not having a degree, qualification or having a disability, language barrier, etc. all these have impacts.

– Female, non-recipient, İstanbul

Having capital is another factor affecting access to employment that was stated by some of the participants. During the FGDs, participants expressed their wishes to set up their own businesses even while discussing different topics.

Considering the findings, it is seen that factors such as social adaptation and legal grounds as well as personal attributes such as language proficiency and advanced age are considered as important factors affecting access to employment. This can be interpreted as employment conditions should also be taken into consideration along with employability in the context of livelihood.

“

If someone has capital, he can meet his needs it even if he is older. If you are old when you want to set up a business for yourself; age does not affect you. If you work as someone's worker, he won't employ you [when you get old]. You must have money to set up a business for yourself, if you employ a worker yourself, your age cannot impede anything. – Male, ESSN recipient, Gaziantep

INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT

Working informally is not a preference, but an obligation, despite all its disadvantages.

The main finding from statements of most participants about informal employment is that working informally is not a preference, but an obligation, despite all its disadvantages. The opinions of the participants vary both in terms of the reasons for the informal work and the difficulties experienced in this process. Among the leading reasons, the participants' responses included economic challenges and will to keep receiving ESSN assistance whereas, the participants consider getting underpaid and precarious work among the challenges. Above all else, the most common reason for informal employment is that the employers are not willing to register the employee with official bodies.

“

It is the owners of the workplace who do this. They say if you're going to work for me, you're going to work without a work permit and formal insurance. – Male, non-recipient, Gaziantep

“

Of course, we would like to work formally with insurance and a work permit, but when we ask the owners of the workplace, they reject it right away. They say, you can work informally or not at all. We have to work to support our families. We all have children. I have 2 children, and I have been in Türkiye for 11 years. – Female, ESSN recipient, İzmir

Another reason that stands out most as the reason for informal employment is that the participants tend to informal employment out of necessity, due to their insufficient economic situation, and because it is the only option. The participants stated that they turn to informal employment to provide for both school expenses and the household's livelihood since they have children and unpaid bills and rents. When the responses of the FGD participants were examined, regardless of the scope of TP or IP, almost one in every three participants mentioned economic poverty as the main reason for informal employment.

“

People have to work. If they don't, they can't save the day. Children have expenses. The cost of living is too much. So, they have to work. If they don't they cannot save the day and we work because we have to.
– Female, ESSN recipient, Eskişehir

“

People work in the informal sector and they face very serious problems because they have to. But they accept these because they have no other options. They have to work in informal jobs because they have already entered the country informally and illegally. They don't have social insurance. Their families are in Afghanistan. They have to earn and send them money. They face a lot of problems. They work 12 hours a day standing. They work overtime. They work hard jobs. They do all kinds of work. For this reason, they have to endure these problems and work. – Female, ESSN recipient, İstanbul

“

As everyone says, the biggest reason is need. If someone is in need, they work in informal jobs, and do whatever they must to earn their keep. – Female, non-recipient, Ankara

Since ESSN assistance operates as a reliable source for recipients to meet their needs, the participant's fear of losing it is considered another prominent reason for informal employment. Some of the participants stated that they prefer informal employment in order to continue to receive assistance despite its disadvantages.

“

One of the obstacles we face is that our boss does not want to register us with the social security, even though I asked him to. The second obstacle is that the Kızılaykart assistance automatically gets canceled when we get social security. We are constantly in fear that the card will be canceled. Today, no one says 'oh, you want to get social security, okay, let's get it done'. If the Kızılaykart assistance were to continue, I would immediately go and get social security tomorrow. – Male, ESSN recipient, İstanbul

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If we get a job with social security first, the Kızılaykart is canceled. Of course, a job with social security is good, but if we get that job in your system, the assistance is cut off. We can't do anything with social security either, I only benefit from it when I am ill or in hospital. Maybe I'm in this country today, and maybe I'll go back to my home country but the 700 TRY I receive helps meet ends. It makes more sense than social security, that's what I think.
– Male, ESSN recipient, Ankara

When asked about the difficulties of informal employment, the participant answers show that the most common difficulties are getting underpaid and employment insecurity. Participants frequently stated that they experience problems with their employers regarding payment of due wages and violation of workers' rights as well as job insecurity due to informal employment. The participants stated that they are underpaid due to their informal work and that employers do not comply with their promises regarding due payment times and amounts of salaries agreed/deserved by the worker. However, the participants focused more on job insecurity and the inability to claim rights in case of violations like employers laying off unregistered employees and there are no legal steps they could take against it.



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Sometimes, if a boss does not like your performance, he immediately pays off the wages you are due, whether daily or weekly, whatever, and fires you. Sometimes he even cuts off half of the money and pays you whatever he deems enough compensation, and tells you that you are fired. And you can't go file a complaint, you can't do anything because you don't have any official documents. – Male, ESSN recipient, Ankara

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First of all, the employers always violate your rights. You work with him for 15-20 days. He doesn't pay you a penny, and you absolutely cannot claim your right. You can't file complaints or anything. Because you are not registered and are an informal worker. You work for 5-10 days and the employer just lays you off. They don't let you do anything. So, there are too many difficulties indeed. The biggest problem is that they are unfair to employees. Say, you have been working a job for 2 months. They pay you only one month's salary. The boss says I don't pay you; you don't have any official documents and you can't claim nothing. – Male, non-recipient, Gaziantep

In this respect, it seems that the participants, who themselves or whose family members work informally, seek such a mode of employment not because of preference but because of a lack of other options. The main factors impeding formal employment are the economic difficulties of the families of the participants and the reluctance of employers to register the worker.

FORMAL EMPLOYMENT

In the FGD sessions, when the advantages and disadvantages of registered employment were asked in connection with the previous question, most of the participants jointly stated that being properly paid and the ability to demand one's rights (which were deemed a challenge of informal work) are the main advantages of formal employment. However, the issue of fringe benefits also stands out as another issue raised by the participants.

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Well, there are a lot of positive aspects. First, you can actually exercise your rights. You can get the minimum wage given to Turkish employees, which amounts to 4,250 TRY, which is the most obvious advantage. There are many advantages, for example, health insurance. In addition, if you have an occupational accident at work, the state or employer cannot immediately dismiss you, which is of course important.

– Male, ESSN recipient, İzmir

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I don't think of many negativities [about formal employment]. Advantages: employment security and employee's rights, better pay that can actually make the end meet. But the disadvantages, I don't know. I can't think of any. The working hours in formal works and in all works, in general, are long and tiresome.

– Female, non-recipient, İstanbul

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In other words, when you work in formal work, your rights are guaranteed, your payment is guaranteed and this is a good thing.

– Male, ESSN recipient, Gaziantep

Participants commonly stated that the fringe benefits are another advantage of formal employment. The participants focused on the fringe benefits such as working hours, leave rights, fixed wages/salaries, health insurance, and pension, which are legally arranged in formal employment.

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Of course, we want to work and have social security. Because getting injured at work is very common. Many friends suffered injuries like that. And bosses do nothing about it. Informal, unregistered workers do not have any rights. Say, an employee fractures one of his feet and cannot work for a month or two, he gets nothing and has to fend for himself. But that wouldn't be the case if he was insured.

– Male, non-recipient, İzmir



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I don't think there is a negative side to formal employment. All the negative situations I heard about were related to informal employment in general. But to mention the advantages; job security, fair wage, and safeguards for the future. As other friends say, when you get older, you can get a salary, a pension. Similarly, formal employment safeguards one's rights in the present too. But I have never heard any disadvantage of formal employment... – Female, non-recipient, Hatay

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It [formal employment] has many advantages. You get insurance. You get health insurance. You have the right to a pension. You have parental leave rights and so many other privileges. – Male, ESSN recipient, Ankara

The most common response of the participants regarding the disadvantages of formal employment, both ESSN recipient and non-recipient, was the cancellation of ESSN assistance, as mentioned earlier. The participants stated that the cancellation of the ESSN is the biggest disadvantage of formal employment and that they can face various difficulties if the ESSN was to be canceled. In this respect, this finding can be interpreted that the contribution of ESSN to the economy of households is quite significant and impactful.

These statements indicate that the advantages of formal employment include fixed/regular income, enjoying rights, and fringe benefits such as health insurance, pension, etc. The biggest concern of the participants is the cancellation of the ESSN, which is considered an important source of contribution to the household.

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A friend of mine is formally employed, with insurance which the boss pays to the government monthly. Maybe he can also apply for and get Turkish citizenship in the future because he now has insurance. Of course, the negative side is that, the Kızılaykart assistance is canceled in this case. This is the biggest handicap. If I get insurance, I will be deprived of these benefits and I will not be able to pay my bills or rent. – Male, ESSN recipient, İstanbul

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...Even if you get a work permit and insurance, the Kızılaykart assistance get cancelled. Currently, we don't get any compensation for this from work. These are the obstacles we face as Syrians. We are suffering more harm than good because of insurance and work permits. They don't help at all. The main problems are identity cards and language barrier. I have insurance and a work permit. I had been getting a Kızılaykart assistance, but it was canceled. Even the assistance I received for [my children who are] students was canceled. When I work with a work permit and insurance, I cannot compensate for this. I live on the salary I receive. I pay rent, bills, and needs. As Syrians with work permits and insurance, we are losing the assistance which we would otherwise get. The assistance help more than the pay we earn, especially considering the high cost of living today. – Male, non-recipient, Gaziantep

Tendency towards Formal Employment

When asked about the important factors that direct individuals under IP and TP to formal employment, it was observed that the common answers, although received in limited numbers, were centred around accessing residence permits and work permits. The most common response received from the participants is that the most important factor that directs individuals to formal employment is its role in accessing a residence permit. The participants also stated that having a residence permit both enhances the probability of employment and accelerates access to employment. In addition to the residence permits, the importance of holding a work permit was also underlined. The participants stated that similar to a residence permit, a work permit also plays an important role in the ability of refugees to work in formal jobs.

In the light of the above information, it can be interpreted that getting a residence and work permit are prominent factors in the participants' tendency towards formal employment. To facilitate the participation of people in formal employment, the frequency of awareness raising activities on formal employment in TRC Community Centers can be increased to reach wider audiences, and employers can be supported and empowered to apply for work permits on behalf of people under IP and TP.

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Those who hold a residence permit work in different places than those who only have an ID. But those who hold a residence permit definitely have much more opportunities for work. Let me explain this way, those who hold a residence permit can have wider job opportunities, they have diplomas, they can find more stable jobs.

– Female, non-recipient, İstanbul

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As one friend said, a work permit is very important. The costs of a work permit are very high, and I have never heard of those under international protection receiving a work permit. But I know for a fact that people with a residence permit can work formally. If you don't have a work permit under Turkish law, you are not allowed to work in formal jobs. They are not formally employed.

– Female, ESSN recipient, İstanbul



FUTURE EMPLOYMENT PLANS

The majority of the participants expressed their intent to found a workplace or business of their own.

When asked what their plan or aspirations for their careers or livelihood is provided that the obstacles against their access to employment were to be eliminated completely or partially, the majority of the participants expressed their intent to found a workplace or business of their own. The examination of the employment status of participants indicated that 12 unemployed participants and 4 participants working informally stated that they aspire to start a business in the future whereas out of participants working formally, only 1 participant shared this aspiration. Besides aspiring to start a business, some participants stated that they wish to switch jobs/to work in a field related to their majors/expertise. Finally, some participants stated that they do not dream of a future in Türkiye, so they aspire to return to their home country or build a new life in a different country.

These statements indicate that the participants' major aspirations for the future include starting a business if the existing challenges were to be eliminated. The fact that especially those unemployed or those working informally mentioned this aspiration can be considered along with the economic insecurity and other challenges of unemployment and informal employment. In addition, the participants expressed their wish to continue their careers in their field of expertise and expressed that they could not see a future for themselves in Türkiye, which supports the problems experienced by individuals under IP and TP in accessing livelihoods, and the difficulties they experience in daily life.

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My dream is this: I want my homeland to be safe and my nation freed from all this uncertainty and this war. I dream of getting an ID and setting up a tailor shop. My spouse was an engineer in Afghanistan. We left everything and came here. All we want is to open a small shop and lead a peaceful life. – Female, ESSN recipient, İstanbul

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In truth, I was an Agricultural Engineer back home. I was a government employee. I have been here for about 10 years and since I arrived I have been looking for a job in my field of expertise but I could not find any. After all, people want to work in the field they were trained. But it's impossible to find a job in this field. – Male, non-recipient, Hatay

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To be honest, I can't see a future for me here in general. Except for the Syrians who already have capital. There is an open market in front of those who set up a business. But for the rest, for most Syrians, there is no future here. – Male, ESSN recipient, Hatay

RECOMMENDATIONS

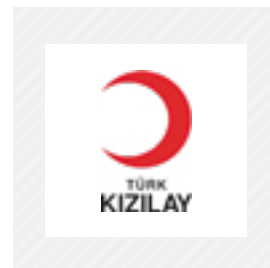
Recommendations based on the findings of the FGDs are as follows:

- 1** Findings suggest that ability to access to employment opportunities differ according to age. People with advanced ages struggle more to find paid jobs. Hence, during the development of livelihood programmes, this difference is a significant factor that needs to be taken into consideration.
- 2** Employers that meet proper criteria can be facilitated and supported to apply for work permits for their refugee employees. Collaborations can be established with non-governmental organizations that are already working on livelihoods in the field.
- 3** Similar to activities ongoing in the TRC Community Centres, initiatives to provide both financial and logistic support to individuals, especially women who can potentially start their own businesses can be encouraged.
- 4** To better address the language barrier, in addition to language courses focused on everyday-language, workshop series focused on Turkish occupational terminology can be developed. In addition, vocational courses and referrals can be customized for people between the ages of 40 and 50.
- 5** The importance of social inclusion is revealed once again considering the factors affecting the access to employment by individuals and the experiences they have at work. For this reason, the continuity of awareness-raising activities on social inclusion is extremely important.

TÜRK KIZILAY (TURKISH RED CRESCENT)

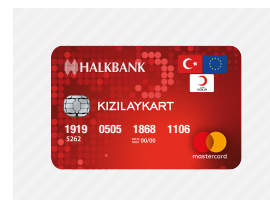
The largest humanitarian organization in Turkey

The Türk Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent) is the largest humanitarian organization in Türkiye, to help vulnerable people in and out of disasters for years, both in the country and abroad. Millions of people currently receive support through our programmes in cooperation with the Government of Türkiye. We are supporting vulnerable people impacted by disasters and other groups in need of humanitarian assistance.



THE “KIZILAYKART”

The Turkish Red Crescent is a humanitarian cash leader in Türkiye and has the well-established “Kızılaykart”, which allows them to provide millions of people cash assistance through a debit card. The Kızılaykart initially provided cash assistance to Turkish citizens and has now transformed into a large-scale cash-based assistance platform that has integrated refugees into the existing national social assistance network, providing different programmes such as education, basic needs, vocational training and language courses in order to meet the needs of vulnerable people. The Kızılaykart implements the largest cash programme in the world and the largest in the European Union’s history, the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN).



THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES (IFRC)

The world’s largest humanitarian network

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world’s largest humanitarian organization, reaching 150 million people in 192 National Societies, including Türk Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent), through the work of 13.7 million volunteers. Together, we act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. The IFRC has been leading large-scale cash programmes for decades in response to a broad spectrum of disasters around the globe, including its largest programme ever – the ESSN in Türkiye with Turkish Red Crescent.

