



BNWG Shelter Note: Refugees' Access to Shelter in Türkiye

This note aims to provide an overview of the recent situation of refugees' access to shelter in Türkiye by referring to the current economic context and the existing shelter support mechanisms targeting the prevailing shelter needs. The possible next steps for enhancing the access of refugees to adequate housing are based on these contextual discussions, and the related advocacy pathways emphasised during the sectoral discourses are highlighted to support the related strategies and programmes targeting refugees and host community members in Türkiye.

Highlights

The current context concerning refugees' access to adequate housing solutions in Türkiye is shaped by certain structural trends. Planning of activities aiming to enhance this access is recommended to take place through strategic consideration of the repercussions of the below situational highlights.

- Several current economic trends such as the rapidly increasing costs of housing, the increasing demand for housing as an attractive investment tool despite the inadequate supply levels and the related considerable price increases adversely affected both refugees' and host community members' access to adequate housing. This situation in turn adversely affects social cohesion through exacerbating societal tension and discrimination based on the false perception that refugees' demand for housing is solely responsible for the rapid rent increases.
- Existing shelter support mechanisms by partners in Türkiye are helpful to assist the most vulnerable refugees and host community members; however, there is a further need for support with regards to shelter, specifically in the area of access to shelter, since the current humanitarian assistance schemes are limited in terms of geographical coverage, number and scope.

Based on the inter-sectoral and sectoral discussions and field observations, the BNWG compiled sectoral advocacy recommendations highlighted below related to designing and implementing support programmes focusing on the improvement of access to housing:

- **Cash-based Interventions (CBIs):** Targeted and strategic cash support for rent should be provided for timely responses to supplement current cash schemes and fill the existing assistance gaps.
- **Rehabilitation of identified shelters:** CBIs in addition to the in-kind support in this respect shall continue in order to render housing supply more adequate to be able to catch-up with the demand more efficiently by increasing the quality of rental houses in practice. This assistance addresses primarily single families and individuals; however, shelter rehabilitation will contribute as well to reduced or fixed rental payments for a limited time.
- **Legal Counselling:** Comprehensive information dissemination and legal counselling activities on issues related to housing (including tenant rights, rental contracts, closed neighbourhoods and so on) should ensue.
- **Needs Assessments:** Comprehensive needs assessments and situational analyses reinforced with field observations and regular M&E exercises addressing access to shelter should be conducted. The evidence-based approach based on such analytical tools should feed into the future advocacy efforts on improving access to housing to be able to design programmes with more sustainable impacts targeting mid- to longer term in addition to satisfying the most immediate needs.



Overview of Refugees' Access to Shelter in Türkiye

In Türkiye, almost 99% of refugees lives in urban or peri-urban areas rather than camps and the negative impact of the current economic context on access to shelter is even more severe for refugees, compounding their already existing vulnerabilities since rent/housing is one of the greatest parts of their expenditures.ⁱⁱⁱ

Many refugees, ESN beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries alike, are compelled to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as reducing food intake due to the need to prioritise paying rent to thwart the risk of homelessness. For this purpose, they are obliged to incur more and more debt, which puts them deeper in the vicious cycle of a debt vortex in the current context of rapidly increasing inflation and continuously decreasing purchasing power.^{iv} This aspect of vulnerability renders most refugees even more susceptible to protection risks such as exploitation by landlords and loaners, especially regarding the higher vulnerable groups including children and women at risk. For example, cases of harassment of survivors of gender-based violence and women heads of households by their landlords and employers were observed to be increasing at the field level. Also, exorbitant rents and the likelihood of illegal evacuation heighten refugees' stress levels and negatively affect their psychosocial well-being.

In addition, the recent policy developments concerning limitations for registration, neighbourhood closures and address verification processes further exacerbate housing challenges in relation to the inactivation of TP/IP statuses.^v

^{vi} It should also be noted that this necessity to move outside of a neighbourhood where the refugee population is upwards of the quota has not been implemented to the same extent in every region and province. For instance, while this was observed to be stricter in SET, it was not as rigorously implemented in Aegean region. However, it can still be noted that the increasing social tensions resulted in similar trends of moving to other less saturated neighbourhoods in terms of refugee population, such as Aegean region. On the other hand, many refugees face the risk of moving to areas farther away from their social safety nets and education facilities of their children, causing new protection concerns. This situation also increases the risk of living in substandard conditions with regards to issues such as overcrowding based mostly on several families having to live in one apartment, living in houses without proper protection from weather conditions etc. Also, the additional demand for rental houses triggers further rent increases which in turn lead to refugees facing with lower vacancy rates and higher rents in open neighbourhoods. Moreover, increase in the number of renters who fail to pay their rents regularly, exacerbating the possibility of inciting social tensions and being subjected to evacuation. In this respect, further attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups such as female-headed households, single parents and the LGBTQI individuals who experience the greatest hardships in meeting their housing needs considering their various social and economic vulnerabilities.

Address registration is necessary for (re-)activation of legal TP/ID statuses needed to access basic services in Türkiye, but finding temporary or permanent shelter in non-residential areas i.e. tents, warehouses and garages cannot give way to address registration and this situation may increase due to the current economic context.

Economic Situation in Relation to Access to Shelter

Access to shelter and managing housing costs have been sources of significant challenge for both vulnerable refugees and host community members in the recent economic context of Türkiye. According to Eurostat, house prices and rents increased by 110% and 15.4% respectively during the period between the first quarters of 2021 and 2022. Overall, rents increased by 20% in the last year as of May 2022.

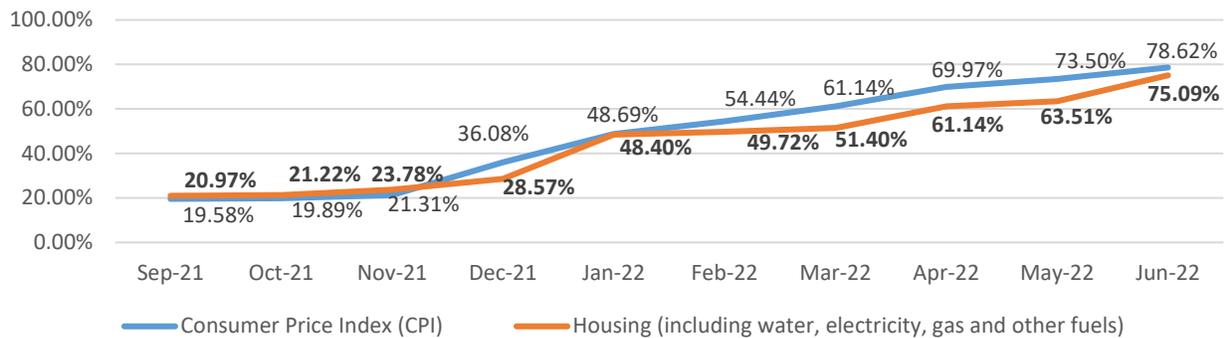
On the other hand, according to the recent analysis of Bahçeşehir University Centre for Economic and Social Research (BETAM) utilising *sahibinden.com* data, the overall average square meter rental price in Türkiye increased by 182.7%



as of April 2022 compared to the previous year, whereas the ratio of the number of rented houses to the number of rental advertisements decreased in İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir.^{vii}

More generally, the overall consumer price index and its housing component that also includes main utility costs have been rapidly increasing according to the official TÜİK data (see Table 1). According to TÜİK, the housing component has the second highest rate of increase (8.34%) and it is greater than the overall rate of change in CPI in Türkiye (4.95%) in June 2022 compared to May 2022.^{viii}

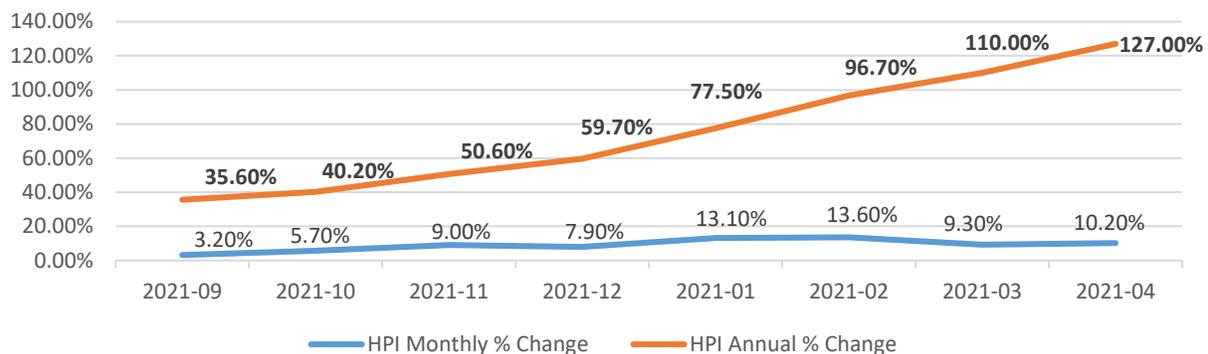
Table 1: Annual Rates of Changes of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Its Housing Component Compared to the Same Month of the Previous Year



Source: Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), *Consumer Price Index - June 2022*, 4 July 2022, available at: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Tuketici-Fiyat-Endeksi-Mayis-2022-45795>

The steep increase of costs in the recent years due to the depreciation of the value of Turkish Lira against foreign currencies has been inflating the prices of new houses and decreasing the overall house supply. In turn, the overall house prices have been increasing (see Table 2). Nevertheless, according to sectoral experts, despite all these price increases, there has not been a decrease in the housing demand; on the contrary, there is not enough house stock in the face of a serious level of demand.^{ix} In addition, attractiveness of real estate as an investment tool has increased in the current context, increasing the sales prices which in turn increases rents.

Table 2: Monthly Rate of Change of the Housing Price Index (HPI) and Annual Housing Rate of Change of HPI (the latter compared to the same month of the previous year)



Source: Central Bank of the Republic of Türkiye (TCMB), *Housing Price Index*, April 2022, available at: <https://www.tcmb.gov.tr/wps/wcm/connect/TR/TCMB+TR/Main+Menu/Istatistikler/Reel+Sektor+Istatistikleri/Konut+Fiyat+Endeksi/>



Shelter Support and the Prevailing Needs in Türkiye Context

Shelter support enhances the living conditions of beneficiaries by improving the physical conditions of their houses with regards to issues including WASH, insulation, protection from weather conditions, safety and security and improvements in electrical infrastructure, also benefiting landlords by increasing the value of their property. Hence, it can be an effective strategy for greater inclusion of host communities and enhancing social cohesion. However, shelter support interventions of this nature are not abundant in the current context of Türkiye. For instance, in 2021, shelter support programmes were mostly limited to Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Adana, İzmir and Istanbul, reaching only 9,022 beneficiaries (41% of the related total sectoral target for that year). It is crucial to note that, despite being effective in increasing the standards of living of its beneficiaries, this modality does not provide support to those who cannot pay their rent due to the increasing prices, and first-time renters having hardships in finding affordable rental apartments.

There are a limited number of support mechanisms for vulnerable individuals to keep paying rent in case of financial restraint. Multi-purpose CBLs play a significant role in meeting refugee needs in Türkiye context, but these alone cannot cover all the housing needs considering the continuously increasing costs of living including other fundamental spending items such as food expenditures. Except for ESN and C-ESN, current basic needs cash programmes are limited in number of beneficiaries and scope in Türkiye. On the other hand, cash for protection programmes do not directly target long-term rent support and many cash for protection and emergency cash support is usually one-off and aim to meet the most pressing and urgent needs. Even with ESN, the support is used by beneficiaries to mostly cover the rental costs, and sometimes may not be adequate even for that due to the increasing rents and consumer prices.^x

In addition, in Türkiye context, access to shelter is organised through the private market and there are a limited number of collective/public shelters and social housing framework does not exist. In addition, the legal framework does not determine a rental price ceiling. A recent regulation that will be valid until July 2023 limits rent increases by 25% but only for ongoing contracts, again leaving a gap in relation to rent new rental.^{xi} Additionally, rental deposits and fees for rental agents should be considered as well as factors aggravating the already dire condition of refugees having to seek out rentals.

Ideally, referrals to livelihoods opportunities would be the most sustainable solution enhancing self-reliance and resilience and the IA coordination continues to work increasing and strengthening referrals to livelihood opportunities. However, the horizon of such endeavours is rather related to the mid- to long-term and for the time being an immediate change in employment opportunities do not seem in reach due to the current economic trends, especially in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing where refugees could traditionally land in jobs more easily.

In this regard, in addition to continuation of traditional basic needs shelter support to rehabilitate sub-standard houses of vulnerable refugees and host community members, specific programmes designed to provide cash for rent support may be more suitable to tackle the current challenges, particularly targeting households in the process of moving and first-time renters. Relevant examples of good practices can be examined for this purpose. For instance, in a similar context of rapidly inflating rents based on higher demand for rental houses, increasing indebtedness and limited income opportunities of Syrian refugees in Jordan, Catholic Relief Services' partner Caritas Jordan provided support in 2014-2015 both via a voucher-based winterisation support for non-food items and a cash for rent support and according to their PDM survey, "80% respondents would have preferred cash support to adapt their spending to their specific needs."^{xii}



Possible Next Steps for the Related Advocacy Measures

To be able to overcome the challenges brought about by the current limitations of access to shelter, the solutions should be designed based on the acknowledgement that “the right to adequate housing is a human right” that must include at a minimum “legal security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, accessibility, habitability, location, and cultural adequacy” as guaranteed by Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.^{xiii} In addition, advocacy efforts aiming at achieving policy developments should consider that as per the Article 57 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye “the State shall take measures to meet the need for housing within the framework of a plan that takes into account the characteristics of cities and environmental conditions, and also support community housing projects.”^{xiv}

Partners should consider dedicated cash for rent programmes, and diversification of other MPCs for refugees in response to the increasing demand for such support in the current context of Türkiye. To improve access to adequate housing, the below areas may be focused on as the next steps concerning the related advocacy efforts targeting the relevant stakeholders including public institutions, donor organisations, and national and international humanitarian community to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of cash for rent/housing support:

- Enhancing access to adequate housing through cash-based interventions by adjusting transfer amounts and frequencies. Although humanitarian assistance highly depends on budget availability and overall aim is decreasing aid dependency and increasing self-reliance, the existing programmes should critically consider their transfer amounts in a regular manner to implement increases as much as necessary in line with the contextual parameters.
- Enhancing ad-hoc CBIs to minimise the negative impact of the increasing rents and decreasing purchasing power on vulnerable households and also improving integrated MPC/protection programming taking into consideration the serious fact that the shelter access challenges further aggravate the existing protection-related vulnerabilities.
- Continuation of legal counselling regarding tenant rights and wider dissemination of timely and clear information on the recent policy developments and regulations related to access to housing on issues such as closed neighbourhoods and address verification.
- Continuation of inter-sectoral efforts for sustainable self-reliance solutions to minimise aid dependency in mid and long term.
- Reinforcing inclusion of refugees and host community members by adopting the Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach and in line with community-based approaches for greater accountability in needs assessments, implementation strategies and advocacy efforts related cash for rent support.
- Increasing and strengthening evidence-based situation analyses and comprehensive needs assessments reinforced with field observations and regular M&E exercises via greater cross-sector coordination, especially between basic needs and protection actors to encourage more effective collaboration regarding assessments on protection-shelter nexus.

ⁱ For the purpose of this document, references to the term “refugee” should be read in accordance with Türkiye’s legal and policy framework, notably the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, as well as the Temporary Protection Regulation, that govern the treatment of Syrians under temporary protection, international protection applicants and status holders in Türkiye.



- ⁱⁱ For reference on the general discussion points related to the field level shelter-related observations from here on, please access the folders of the related BNWG meetings through the links: [March 2022 SET BNWG Field Meeting](#), [April 2022 National BNWG Meeting](#), [June 2022 SET BNWG Field Meeting](#), [June 2022 İstanbul BNWG Meeting](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ According to Inter-Agency Protection Sector Needs Assessment Analysis Round 5, “the most difficult to manage costs remained the same as Round 4, namely food (73%), rent/housing (67%) and utilities (44%)” for respondents. Inter-Agency Coordination Türkiye, *Inter-Agency Protection Sector Needs Assessment Analysis - Round 5 – EN*, 22 June 2022, available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/93797>
- ^{iv} TRC / IFRC, *The Stress of Debt: Effects on the Lives of People Living in Türkiye under Temporary and International Protection - Focus Group Discussion Analysis Report - December 2021*, 16 December 2021, available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90104> ; TRC / IFRC, *Deepening Poverty and Debt | Socioeconomic Impacts for Refugees in Türkiye One Year on from COVID-19- Findings from the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) Survey (Round 12) in Türkiye*, 16 December 2021, available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90113>
- ^v "Duty of Signature: Within the same period, it was announced that newly registered Syrian refugees are obliged with the duty of signature every two weeks for three months at PDMM offices. While different implementations have been observed, the primary objective for PDMMs was to ensure that newly registered refugees stay in the province of registration." WHH Türkiye Briefing Note, August 2022, Integrated Protection Programming in Gaziantep and Hatay
- ^{vi} Presidency for Migration Management (PMM), *Regarding Neighborhood Closures, 30 June 2022*, available at: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/mahalle-kapatma-duyurusu-hk2> ; A related [presentation](#) on these recent policy developments delivered by UNHCR PDU in June STF Meeting and the relevant [minutes](#) can be accessed through the links.
- ^{vii} Bahçeşehir University Center for Economic and Social Research (BETAM), *sahibindenx Rental Housing Market Outlook: Rental prices continue to rise*, May 2022, available at: <https://betam.bahcesehir.edu.tr/2022/05/kiralik-konut-piyasasi-gorunumu-mayis-2022/>
- ^{viii} Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), *Consumer Price Index - June 2022*, 4 July 2022, available at: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Tuketici-Fiyat-Endeksi-Mayis-2022-45795>
- ^{ix} BBC News, *Why are rent and house prices increasing?*, 21 April 2022, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-61174290>
- ^x TRC / IFRC, *The Stress of Debt: Effects on the Lives of People Living in Türkiye under Temporary and International Protection - Focus Group Discussion Analysis Report - December 2021*, 16 December 2021, available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90104>
- ^{xi} BBC News, *Rent increase rate: What do the government and opposition say about the 25 percent limit?*, 8 June 2022, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-61731957>
- ^{xii} Catholic Relief Services, *Using Cash for Shelter: Rent Assistance for Syrian Refugees*, 2016, available at: <https://www.calpnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Sjordan.pdf>
- ^{xiii} Housing and Land Rights Network Habitat International Coalition, *Handbook on UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement - Third Edition*, November 2010, available at: <https://www.hlrn.org/img/publications/internationa%20handbook.pdf>
- ^{xiv} Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, available at: https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/docs/constitution_en.pdf