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 programme targeting refugees and host community members in Türkiye.

Highlights

The current context to 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 strategical 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.
- Existing shelter support mechanisms by partners in Türkiye are helpful to assist the most vulnerable individuals; however, there is a further need for support in this area since the current assistance schemes have limitations in terms of geographical coverage and number of targeted beneficiaries.

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

- **Cash-based Interventions (CBIs):** To supplement current cash schemes and fill the assistance gaps, targeted and strategic cash support for rent should be provided for timely responses.
- **Legal Counselling:** Comprehensive information dissemination and legal counselling activities on issues related to housing (including tenant rights, 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.

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.

Many refugees, ESSN 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 ever-decreasing purchasing power. This aspect of vulnerability renders most refugees even more susceptible to protection risks such as exploitation by landlords and loaners, especially regarding 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 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.\textsuperscript{v} Due to the foreign population quotas implemented in the closed neighbourhoods, many refugees are urged to move, and in many cases housing availability is in neighbourhoods with higher rents. Moreover, they risk moving to areas farther away from their safety nets and education facilities of their children, causing several protection concerns. This situation also increases the risk of living in substandard conditions with regards to issues such as overcrowding, living in houses without proper protection from weather conditions etc. Also, the additional demand for rental houses triggers further rent increases, exacerbating the possibility of inciting social tensions.

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 is expected to increase due to the current economic context.

**Economic Situation in Relation to Access to Shelter**

Access to shelter and managing housing costs have been a source of significant challenges for both 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.\textsuperscript{vi}

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 is is greater than the overall rate of change in CPI in Türkiye (4.95%) in June 2022 compared to May 2022.\textsuperscript{vii}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>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</th>
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</thead>
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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.\textsuperscript{viii} 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>HPI Monthly % Change</th>
<th>HPI Annual % Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021-09</td>
<td>3.20%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-10</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-11</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-12</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-01</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021-02</td>
<td>13.60%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-03</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>120.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021-04</td>
<td>10.20%</td>
<td>140.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, 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, there is a lack of such shelter support in the current context of Türkiye. For instance, in 2021, shelter support programmes were mostly limited to Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Hatay, İzmir and Istanbul, reaching only 9,022 beneficiaries (41% of the related total sectoral target). It is crucial to note that this modality does not help those who cannot pay their rent due to the increasing prices and first-time renters having hardships in finding affordable rental apartments despite being effective in increasing the standards of living of its beneficiaries.

There are a limited number of support mechanisms for vulnerable individuals to keep paying rent in case of financial restrain. Multi-purpose CBIs 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 ESSN and C-ESSN, 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 ESSN, 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.\textsuperscript{ix}

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 no social housing frameworks. 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 providing rent support to first-time renters and those searching for a new rental.\textsuperscript{x}
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 jobs more easily.

In this regard, specific programmes designed to provide cash for rent support may be more suitable to tackle the current challenges in Türkiye considering the increase in the demand for rental houses, particularly by both individuals 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.”xi

**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.xii 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.”xiii

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:

- Increasing the flexibility of cash support programmes targeting access to adequate housing to increase amounts and frequencies of cash transfers.
- Enhancing ad-hoc CBIs to minimise the negative impact of the increasing rents and decreasing purchasing power.
- 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 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 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.

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1 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.

2 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 Istanbul BNWG Meeting

3 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


5 Presidency for Migration Management (PMM), Regarding Neighborhood Closures, 30 June 2022, available at: https://www.goc.gov.tr/mahalle-kapotma-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.

6 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/


8 BBC News, Why are rent and house prices increasing?, 21 April 2022, available at: https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-61174290


10 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

