LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF REFUGEES IN TÜRKİYE

UNHCR in Türkiye
April 2025

108,520 Syrians (**6 per cent female**) received work permits in Türkiye as of 2023.

22,368 refugees accessed İŞKUR services with UNHCR's interpreter support.

600 employers were informed about work permit applications and legislation through seminars organized by DGoILF and UNHCR .

Context

Capacity-building training with Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce for women-led cooperative members.

Access to livelihoods and formal employment for refugees plays a critical role in strengthening self-reliance for individuals and reducing aid dependency by contributing to economic growth in the host country. It also fosters social cohesion. The inclusion of registered refugees, under temporary and international protection, in the Turkish labour market is legally recognised by allowing refugees to obtain work permits. Turkish authorities cite this measure as a key step in reducing reliance on humanitarian aid. In 2023, 108,520 Syrians, 8,521 Iranians, 6,204 Afghans, and 3,915 Iraqis held valid work permits, representing a portion of the refugee population seeking stable employment and economic self-sufficiency. Employment data from 2022 indicated that many found work in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and services. According to the 2023 Labor Market Research, the sectors with the highest employment rates are manufacturing at 20.5%, wholesale and retail trade at 22.8%, and accommodation and food services at 8.4%. Türkiye is the 17th largest economy in the world, according to the IMF, with a GDP of $1.024 trillion as of 2023. Key industries include manufacturing, automotive, tourism, and agriculture. These industries offer potential employment opportunities for host community members and refugees in Türkiye and contribute significantly to the country's economy.

Working in Partnership

UNHCR Türkiye has collaborated with key national institutions, including the Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR) and the Directorate General of International Labour Force (DGoILF) to enhance refugees' access to economic opportunities. İŞKUR, Türkiye's national employment agency, facilitates access to the labour market by offering employment services and vocational training. With UNHCR's support, İŞKUR's existing digital job-matching system was further enhanced to improve the accuracy of matching individuals with suitable job opportunities based on their profiles. This upgrade has allowed individuals – including refugees – to register online, access job search tools remotely, and be matched with relevant vacancies without the need to physically visit İŞKUR offices. In collaboration with DGoILF, UNHCR has conducted seminars focusing on support to employers and awareness raising on work permit legislation. These seminars have informed employers about legal requirements and procedures for hiring refugees, guiding them through the complexities of the work permit application process and ensuring compliance with labor laws.

Through expanding development engagement and partnerships with International Finance Institutions such as the World Bank and the **UNHCR-International Finance Corporation (IFC) Joint Initiative** based in Istanbul, UNHCR seeks to advance the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and host community members through evidence-based policy and market-driven solutions. Key work areas focus on financial inclusion and engaging the private sector to support refugee self-reliance, employment and livelihoods. UNHCR also works closely with UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes such as the 3RP in collaboration with UNDP and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to enhance coordination and strengthen advocacy efforts.

UNHCR is continuing support for women-led cooperatives and social enterprises in Türkiye. Discussions with private sector partners seek to secure favourable commission terms with major online sales platforms to help increase the visibility and sales of cooperatives. Internet platforms are also willing to provide the training and guidance to help effectively manage and grow their online presence. Additionally, UNHCR is working to secure in-kind support from private sector partners to enhance the operational capacity of the cooperatives. This aims to strengthen local businesses, promote self-reliance, and contribute to the development of sustainable, inclusive economies in the region.

UNHCR is grateful to the donors for unearmarked and softly earmarked contributions to the refugee response. UNHCR in Türkiye is also thankful to donors who are contributing to the 2025 programmes. For more details: UNHCR Türkiye Funding Update – 31 March 2025.